# ORIENTATIONS TO ACTION

## A STUDY OF ATTENDANCE AREA POLICIES

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85-1321/

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study could not have been conducted without the support, cooperation and assistance of a large number of people. The support and assistance of the Superintendent of Schools, Larry Naidoo, and his staff in the central office of the Spirit River School Division was very much appreciated as was the cooperation of the Board and all of its members. All of these people talked frankly, openly and honestly with us. We are also appreciative of the assistance given by the school principals in distributing and collecting questionnaires and in taking time to arrange interviews for us. Their free and frank discussions with us were also very helpful in carrying out the purposes of the study. The time and effort given by all the parents and ratepayers who completed the questionnaire and took time from busy schedules to share their opinions and concerns with us was also very much appreciated.

Our thanks are extended to Pat Ehman, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration, who prepared the Literature Review for us and analysed the responses to the Survey of School Systems. We would also like to thank the secretarial staff of the Department of Educational Administration for their assistance in preparing the questionnaires and this report. A special thank you must go to our secretary, Betty Brown, who assisted with all phases of the project and who prepared the manuscript for this report.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Attendance Area Study was to examine attendance areas in the Spirit River School Division, including the development of alternative approaches designed to improve attendance area policies and regulations and resolve the underlying concerns and issues.

In conducting the study data from the Spirit River School Division were collected by means of (1) interviews with Board members, administrators, principals, and over eighty -- mainly self-selected, parents and ratepayers; (2) questionnaires to all parents sending their children to Spirit River School Division schools, or to other public schools outside of the Division (Dawson Creek, Rolla and Donnelly); and (3) visits to each of the Division's attendance areas. Relevant data from outside of the Division were collected by means of searches of the literature on the latest research and practice and a survey of practices in other similar Alberta school systems.

### Findings

The findings of the study of opinions and preferences within the Spirit River School Division are reported under seven sub-headings -- satisfaction with schools, school preference, attendance areas, number and distribution of schools, change to current programs, school bus service, and other concerns.

#### Satisfaction with Schools

A substantial majority of those parents surveyed expressed satisfaction with the schools their children attend. However, a fairly large minority indicated some degree of dissatisfaction. Examples of dissatisfactions included inadequate buildings and facilitites, limited programs and some inadequate instruction.

#### School Preference

Most parents prefer to send their children to the schools they are presently attending. Of those who do not, the largest grouping would rather send their children to one of the Spirit River schools. However, there is also a number of parents who presently send their children to one of the Spirit River schools, who would prefer to send them to one of the other schools in the Division.

### Attendance Areas

A majority of parents prefer an "open" attendance area policy; that is, they would prefer to have the choice of sending their children to whatever school in the Division they choose. Of those holding this preference the largest group also believe that the Division should provide the transportation, or at least pay for transportation costs. However, nearly seventeen percent of those responding do not believe parents should be able to send their children to schools outside of the attendance area. Their major fear is the loss of the school and then the community. It should also be pointed out that although most parents want an *Open Attendance Area* policy, most would not send their children to schools outside of the assigned attendance area.

### Preferences Regarding Number and Distribution of Schools

Parents, by and large, do not favour the further centralization of schools. In fact a large majority favours retaining the present schools, or even adding new schools to better serve the area. Very few favour the closing of any schools, especially at the elementary and junior high school levels.

### Change to Current Programs

Most parents believe that the program in most schools should be expanded by adding vocational education. A large majority also believe that an optional program on religion should be offered to those who want it.

### School Bus Service

As with the other services, most parents are satisfied with the transportation provided. However, a fairly large minority expressed some dissatisfactions. Most dissatisfactions were with the routes, the length of the route, the time spent on the bus and the early pick up time.

### Other Concerns

Several other concerns were expressed by those interviewed and by those responding to the questionnaire. Of these, those mentioned most had to do with lack of communication with central office and the lack of information about, and involvement in, major policy decisions which have a serious impact upon the child, the parent and the community.

## Issues Identified

The findings of this study, plus information obtained from outside of the Division gave rise to the identification of several issues which have an impact upon the Spirit River School Division in respect to attendance areas, transportation and other related responsibilities and operations. Some of these issues are constraints which cannot be changed, but which must be taken into account in developing policies and programs. Others can be changed, but with difficulty and only over time. Some of the issues, however, are contingencies which can be changed more readily by the Division.

### Constraint Issues not Subject to Change

The following issues, which exist in the Spirit River School Division, cannot be readily changed, but must be taken into account in developing programs and policies dealing with attendance areas and related matters.

1. The geographic characteristics of the area, which divide the Division into several semi-isolated communities with strong loyalties, which make transportation difficult, and which make it easier to attend school and conduct business in communities outside of the Spirit River School Division;
2. The social and cultural characteristics of the people which are created in part by the geographic characteristics of the area and rapidly changing communications and transportation patterns. These characteristics include: an agricultural economy with a declining population base; strong community loyalties; strong and divergent social and educational philosophies; and an expanding industrial and urban life style vs. the maintenance of a rural life style.
3. the language and religious differences in the area, which often result in pressures to change school programs or establish private schools.

### Constraint Issues Subject to Change

The following issues, which exist in the Spirit River School Division, are subject to change, but with difficulty and only over time. However, whether they are changed or not they must be taken into account in establishing policies and programs in respect to attendance areas and other related matters:

1. the location and nature of school facilities;
2. the composition of the bus fleet;

3. the nature of school grants, and the policies and practices affecting supplementary requisitions; and
4. the differing educational philosophies of the people of the Division.

**Contingency Issues**

The following issues are contingencies which exist in the Spirit River School Division, and which affect the attendance area policies and programs in the Division. They are subject to change by the Division;

1. the present school attendance area policies and practices, which are the subject of some concern in the Division and which were one of the motivating factors which gave rise to this study;
2. the present transportation policies and practices which are closely related to school attendance area practices and which are also the subject of some concern in the Division;
3. the present educational program, how they are delivered and the policies and regulations governing the development of these programs and their delivery -- these are viewed differently depending on the educational philosophies held by the various concerned individuals and groups;
4. road, communication and transportation upgrading and how these could effect the possible alteration of bus routes; and
5. the administration and communication policies and practices followed in the Spirit River School Division.

**Alternative Policies**

Although the major purpose of this study was to examine attendance area policies, regulations and alternative possibilities, and the related transportation policies, the study team was also asked to identify underlying concerns and suggest ways and means of dealing with them. Several related and underlying concerns were identified as issues which must be resolved, or at least taken into account, in considering attendance area and transportation policies for the Division. The two most critical are Quality Education (the policies and practices related to the nature of education and its delivery), and Planning and Administrative Decision Making. Unless some attention is given to these two areas of concern any change in attendance area and transportation policies are likely to be ineffective. Therefore, several "orientations to policy" alternatives in these two areas are presented. Several alternative "orientations to policy" are also given in the areas directly related to the purpose of this study -- School Attendance Areas, and Transportation.

**Quality Education**

Two alternatives are suggested for consideration by the Board. One orientation, *Quality Based on Conventional Standards,* is the traditional approach used to assess education in most jurisdictions. The focus in this orientation is on size of school (students and teachers), facilities, programs, courses, support services, mode of delivery, etc. and to move toward equivalency across the Division in terms of these criteria. The other alternative, *Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives,* would produce more variety in programs and modes of delivery.

**Planning and Administrative Decision Making**

Two alternatives in regard to this area of concern are also suggested for consideration by the Board. The first orientation, *Administration Based on Responsibility,* bases administrative structures and practices on the traditional "bureaucratic" model in use in most school systems. The second alternative, *Administration Based on Involvement,* bases administrative and planning practices primarily on the concept of involvement of those concerned and affected.

**School Attendance Areas**

The major purpose of this study was to examine school attendance areas. Therefore, four alternatives are presented: the *Closed Attendance Area* policy which makes it difficult for a student to attend a school outside of the designated attendance area; a *Semi-Closed Attendance Area* policy; a *Semi-Open Attendance Area* policy; and an *Open Attendance Area* policy which places few restrictions on the schools students can attend.

**Transportation**

Two alternative policy orientations are presented in respect to the transportation of students to and from school. The *Student Oriented* policy would base most policies and regulations on the well being of the student and his/her needs. The *Efficiency Oriented* alternative would place greater emphasis on the efficiency of transporting students.

### Recommendations

This report does not contain specific recommendations for action -- the development and consideration of these is the perogative of the Board and its officials. Rather the report presents a few "orientations to action" -- a basic set of criteria to guide the policy, program and regulation development process, for each of the areas for which alternatives were presented; namely, Quality Education, Attendance Areas, Transportation, and Planning and Administrative Decision Making. Recommendations are also presented respecting ways and means of considering this report and developing and implementing policies and programs growing out of it.

#### Quality Education

The *Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives* orientation is the one recommended to the Board. It is probably the orientation which would best meet the long term needs of the people of the Division because it favours the development of programs and delivery mechanisms which meet the needs and wants of a wide variety of interest groups and people who hold different philosophical positions.

#### School Attendance Areas

An *Open Attendance Area* orientation is recommended to the Board. This orientation is favoured by a large majority of the parents in the Division: it would not result in a significant shift in attendance patterns and it would best meet the Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives orientation, which is also recommended to the Board.

#### Transportation

Transportation policies based on a *Student Orientation* are recommended and, with innovative programs, would probably not cost significantly more to implement.

#### Planning and Administrative Decision Making

An *Administration Based on Involvement* orientation is the one most appropriate for the Division, especially if the other recommendations of this report are adopted.

#### Consideration and Action

An Involvement Orientation is also recommended for the Board's consideration of this report and for developing and implementing decisions growing out of it. Specifically, it is recommended that a broadly-based planning committee be established to oversee a thorough study of the report and that a set of task forces, also broadly based, be created to undertake the review and development work required.

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# BACKDROP

The equitable delivery of educational services in sparsely settled rural areas in Alberta has created concerns and problems from the time that the state assumed responsibility for education and made school attendance compulsory. These concerns are exacerbated in times of public spending restraints, especially when the school age population is dropping or migrating to larger centres, which is the prevalent condition in most rural areas in Alberta today. These concerns are again magnified when the prevalent educational philosophy of bigness, variety and specialization is challenged by the emerging philosophy of smallness, community and gestaltism.

These underlying concerns generally surface, in respect to the administration of a school system, in specific problems having to do with attendance areas and boundaries, school closures and centralization, minimum levels of education in small schools, and a variety of other problems surrounding the quality of education.

The increasing intensity of several of these surface problems prompted the Board of Trustees of the Spirit River School Division to commission this study of attendance areas in the spring of 1983. The Request for a Proposal and the Proposal, which was approved by the Board of Trustees, are contained in Appendix 1.

## Study Purposes and Design

The purpose of this project was to study attendance areas in the Spirit River School Division including the development of alternative approaches designed to improve attendance area policies and regulations and to resolve the underlying concerns and issues.

The study was conducted using the following techniques:

1. The underlying concerns and the context in which the study was conducted were investigated through
    a. a survey of relevant school system documents;
    b. interviews with Board members, administrators and a few concerned parents, and
    c. a tour of the school system.
2. The identification of the wants, needs, beliefs and concerns of relevant stakeholders was made through
    a. a questionnaire survey of all parents of K-12 students resident in the Division, (see

Appendices 2 and 3)

  b. interviews with a sampling (mainly self-selected) of residents in each school community (see Appendix 4), and
  c. interviews with school principals.

3. The identification of relevant policies and practices was made through
   a. a review of the literature in the field (see Appendix 5), and
   b. a survey of twenty-five other rural school jurisdictions in Alberta with similar characteristics (see Appendices 6 and 7).
4. The data collected through the means described above were collated, analysed and interpreted; issues surrounding the problem area were identified; alternative ways of resolving, or coping, with the issues were developed; as were recommendations for consideration by the Board of Trustees of the Spirit River School Division.

## SPIRIT RIVER -- CURRENT POLICIES, PRACTICES AND CONCERNS

### School Bussing

Spirit River School Division #47 has an established policy (1978) that weather and road conditions permitting, pupils residing more than three miles from the school they are directed to attend will be provided bus transportation and picked up no more than one-half mile from their residence. In winter months bus service may be provided, where possible, to pupils residing more than one mile from the school. Transportation will also be provided to students who live closer than three miles to the school when the request is accompanied by a doctor's certificate certifying such a need.

Policy also dictates that requests for adjustment, elimination, or establishment of bus routes must be submitted to the Supervisor of Transportation who has full authority for such decisions. The Supervisor of Transporation also is vested with full authority for decisions related to the transfer of pupils to other busses and / or other routes.

In general, the supervisor of transportation establishes bus routes which are ". . . reviewed annually to reflect changes in school population on various routes (23/01/78)." As well, the supervisor of transportation may effect any changes deemed necessary to existing bus routes during the school year.

Apparently, no written policy exists relating to the length of time a pupil spends on a bus. In practice, the study team was informed that attempts are made to ensure that no child is required to board a bus before 7:30 a.m. and that the maximum length of time a child spends travelling to school on a bus should not exceed one hour and twenty minutes. As well, practice is bound, to the extent possible, to the principle of "first on-first off". Nor, apparently, is there written policy dealing with the transportation of Division pupils outside the Division boundaries. Provision is, however, made for the bussing of pupils from outside the Division boundaries to schools within the Division. In practice, as well, high school students in both the east and west ends of the Division are bussed to Donnelly and Dawson Creek schools respectively, outside the Division boundaries. In both cases, the reason advanced has centered on the broader program choices in those schools.

The Supervisor of Transportation routinely effects the changes to routes deemed necessary to meet policy dictates. In situations where parents disagree with changes or desire to send their child to a different school -- thus affecting bussing arrangements -- the matter is referred to the school Board for action (see Attendance Areas below).

## Attendance Areas

The Spirit River School Division operates what might be termed a "closed" attendance area system. Eight attendance areas have been established to serve the educational needs of the Division's school age children, and parents are expected to send their children for schooling to the designated school serving the attendance area in which they reside. The established attendance areas are historically and traditionally significant in that they tend to be defined with geographical rationality for the most part, and they also appear to be based on the business centres frequented by the resident families. In at least one case, however, the set boundaries do not coincide with the School Board member electoral boundary, creating particular problems for the Board Member involved and those parents who may perceive themselves to be "disenfranchised". In any case, the attendance areas established are "closed" in the sense that parents who, for whatever reason (health or program considerations generally), desire to send their children to schools outside the attendance area, must receive special permission. Such special cases generally require submission of the request to the administration. The administration handles about 90% of the requests and refers the rest to the School Board at a Board meeting where parents may be asked to make an in-person presentation.

In practice, when the request is deemed reasonable, and space exists in the receiving school, the request is approved. Similarly, approval must be given for attendance at schools outside the Division -- and granted for health or program reasons only. Transportation is provided for students for whom such approval has been granted.

No process appears to exist in established policy to facilitate the review, on periodic occasions, of the attendance area boundaries themselves. The present attendance areas were established several years ago, and with the exception of relatively minor changes in some, they have not been altered. Nor does established policy appear to exist designed to periodically re-assess the rationale for bussing selected groups of students to schools outside the boundaries of the Division. The absence of written policy in this connection, and the lack of established review procedures has meant that the Board is required to deal with each case in a "reactive" manner as problems surface.

## Quality Schooling

The Spirit River School Board has "gone on record" as being committed to the preservation of the small schools in the Division. The Board has not adopted a policy with respect to the "bigger is better" stance, and in practice advocates educational equivalence for all operating schools in the Division. As a regular practice, pupil/teacher ratios (ordinarily 19.5:1) are relaxed in smaller schools when it appears that a rigid adherence to such ratios would adversely affect the educational opportunities for pupils in those schools. The Board has recently adopted, as well, what is termed a "critical minimum enrolment" incorporating a pupil/grade ratio of 7:1. When a school's enrolment reaches this "critical minimum" (e.g. an eight-grade school with an enrolment below 56) the Board is committed to a review of the operation of that school with a view to seek ways to assist the school. The intent, according to the Superintendent, is to arrive at decisions in such cases through actively involving parents in "open" communication and decision making processes.

In the smaller elementary schools split-grades are generally seen as necessary, while triple-grading is deemed unacceptable and is not used unless absolutely necessary. The smaller high schools are expected to offer at least a minimally-acceptable academic program occasioning the phasing of sequenced academic courses in some of the smaller schools. In the smallest of the high schools the provision of broad programming is difficult if not impossible given the present delivery systems. Thus the focus in the smaller school is on equivalency in the basic academic subjects to the extent possible. School principals in several of the smaller schools, along with staff members, exert considerable time and energy in exploiting community resources (parents and others) to supplement the school's program.

## Concerns

A number of concerns related to school attendance areas were identified early in the project. These concerns were articulated by Board Members and interested parents and parent groups during an initial interviewing phase. The study team's task was to assess the perceptions of parents of students in the Spirit River School Division with respect to these identified concerns. Two methodolgies were employed and the results are reported here:

1. questionnaires were distributed to all parents in the Division, and

2. interviews were conducted with principals, interested staff members and self-selected parents in each of the schools in the Division.

**Questionnaires**

In order to ensure that all parents had a chance to provide input to the study, two questionnaires were designed:

1. a questionnaire designed for parents of pupils who were currently registered in the Kindergarten program in the District, and
2. a questionnaire designed for parents of pupils currently of school age.

Copies of the two questionnaires are included in Appendix 2, with a tabluation of the responses to each question included in Appendix 3.

The Kindergarten questionnaire was distributed to 124 parents through the kindergarten teachers. Children took the questionnaire home, and parents were asked to complete it and return it with their child. Of the 124 questionnaires distributed, 64 were returned for a return rate of 51.6%. The second questionnaire was distributed to parents with children of school age in the Spirit River School Division. For children who are currently registered in the Division, the questionnaire was sent home with the youngest child. Parents of children who normally would attend Division schools, but were attending schools outside the Division had the questionnaire mailed to them. Of the 798 questionnaires distributed to parents 561 were returned for a return rate of 70.3%. Parents were asked to identify the "Attendance Area" in which they resided. Table 1 shows the distribution of the responses for both the parents of Kindergarten children and of school age children. As can be seen, all attendance areas were well represented in the responses with, as could be expected, a much larger number of responses coming from the Spirit River Attendance Area.

**Interviews**

In an effort to validate the questionnaire data and to get a first-hand knowledge of the Division, the study team visited each of the attendance areas for a half day and interviewed parents and principals who shared their thoughts concerning matters relevant to the study. The Division facilitated these visits by advertising them and inviting parents to share their views and voice their concerns. Without exception, the school principals were

**Table 1**

**Response to Parent Questionnaire**

| Attendance Area | Parents of School Age Children | Parents of Kindergarten Children |
|---|---|---|
| Blueberry Creek | 39 | 2 |
| Bonanza | 48 | 2 |
| Eaglesham | 79 | 8 |
| Rycroft | 79 | 11 |
| Savanna | 58 | 9 |
| Spirit River | 173 | 20 |
| Wanham | 49 | 6 |
| Woking | 34 | 6 |

cooperative and accommodating in providing the scheduling and facilities for the visits. As well, each principal took time from busy schedules to spend forty-five minutes or longer to acquaint the team with community factors, parental concerns, and school problems and strengths from their own perspectives.

For the most part, the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis between a parent and a team member. Occasionally, small groups of parents and/or delegations were interviewed by more than one team member. In all, 82 parents were interviewed.

As noted earlier, the interview process was designed to provide a kind of qualitative check or validation to the results of the questionnaire data. The questionnaire, in turn, was devised following discussions, interviews, and perception checks with Board Members, Central Office staff, and several interested groups of parents. Accordingly, the interviews took the form of open-ended questions to parents concerning the following broad topics:

1. the numbers, types and quality of schools serving the Division;
2. policies on attendance areas; and
3. quality of bus service.

As might be expected, open-ended questions, coupled with a deliberate attempt to make the interview process non-threatening, can lead to the accumulation of more data than are necessary to answer the questions posed. Such data, however, often provide insight into the development and refinement of "issue statements". These are dealt with in a subsequent section of this report. Thus, we deal here strictly with the responses to the pertinent questions posed. The interview schedule employed is replicated in Appendix 4.

## Findings

### Satisfaction with Schools

Parents with children in schools were asked how satisfied they were with the schools their children attend. Table 2 shows the responses for the schools in the Spirit River School Division.

Parents were asked what were the best features of the school their children attended. The most common responses in the decreasing order are given below. If parents from one region identified one reason disproportionately, that is noted.

1. Has good teachers (99)
2. Close to home (75)
3. Good parent / school communication (61)
4. Has good courses (43) (identified primarily at Spirit River)
5. Generally satisfied (35)
6. Has smaller classes (29) (identified mainly at Blueberry Creek)
7. Good extra curricular activities (28) (identified mainly at Spirit River)

Parents were also asked to identify where the school needed improvement. Again, the most common responses were:

1. Improve the school building (75) (Eaglesham and Rycroft had a disproportionally high response)
2. More and better teachers (60)
3. More options (35)
4. Better sports program (26)
5. Improve courses (25)
6. Improve all areas (21)

Interview data with respect to satisfaction suggest that parents generally reacted to the question of satisfaction in term of "quality of education". For the most part, parents

### Table 2

### Satisfaction With Current School

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blueberry Creek | 21<br>(41.18%) | 28<br>(54.90%) | 1<br>(1.96%) | 1<br>(1.96%) |
| Bonanza | 18<br>(27.69%) | 36<br>(55.38%) | 7<br>(10.77%) | 4<br>(6.15%) |
| Eaglesham | 22<br>(16.42%) | 93<br>(69.40%) | 12<br>(8.96%) | 7<br>(5.22%) |
| Rycroft | 28<br>(24.56%) | 71<br>(62.28%) | 14<br>(12.28%) | 1<br>(0.88%) |
| Savanna | 24<br>(22.02%) | 79<br>(72.48%) | 6<br>(5.50%) | 0<br>(0.0%) |
| Sp. River Elem. | 70<br>(51.09%) | 63<br>(45.99%) | 2<br>(1.46%) | 2<br>(1.46%) |
| Sp. River High | 46<br>(20.35%) | 136<br>(60.18%) | 36<br>(15.93%) | 8<br>(3.54%) |
| Wanham | 24<br>(27.59%) | 51<br>(58.62%) | 12<br>(13.79%) | 0<br>(0.0%) |
| Woking | 8<br>(17.02%) | 26<br>(55.32%) | 12<br>(25.53%) | 1<br>(2.13%) |
| Other | 19<br>(59.38%) | 9<br>(28.13%) | 0<br>(0.0%) | 4<br>(12.50%) |

interviewed felt that the elementary school in their attendance area provided adequate quality. The expressed dissatisfactions in most cases centered less on the school than on factors related to the Division. For instance, a number of parents stated that the Division was apparently unable to attract good teachers who would stay in the area, that the pupil/teacher ratio discriminated against small schools, and that the Division did not pay enough attention to teacher and program evaluation.

Nearly every parent interviewed cited a "bad" experience with a teacher. By the same token, most parents also noted examples of what they considered good teachers and good teaching they had observed. In most schools -- but not all -- those interviewed commended the school offerings at the elementary level. The majority of parents interviewed in all schools favoured the retention of the smaller schools.

In those high schools with dwindling enrolment, the interviews revealed both resignation and determined opposition respecting the "bigger is better" concept. Parents interviewed who were concerned with high school offerings were generally of the view that small high schools were offering a rather narrow academic program. While some indicated satisfaction with this observation, others wanted their children to have a broader choice including Industrial Arts, Home Economics, and/or a vocational-type program. In the words of one of these parents, her high school age children were ". . . second class citizens of the school system".

Other views expressed with respect to "satisfaction with schools" tended to focus on a variety of topics. For instance, in a number of interviews parents expressed dissatisfaction with a perceived practice of "hiring by telephone" and "being unable to get rid of poor teachers." Much dissatisfaction was evident in interviews with respect to the development of private schools and a perceived inability to offer the kind of programs which would attract some private school supporters back to the Division. Others suggested that if the Board were to be stricter with respect to attendance area policy, enrolment would justify the provision of more teachers and a better quality program, particularly at the secondary level. It was this latter question of attendance areas that was mentioned most often in terms of "dissatisfaction" and it is dealt with in a subsequent section of this report.

Generally the interview data tend to support the quantitative data provided through the questionnaire survey. That is, as with the questionnaire data findings, most parents interviewed were relatively satisfied with their schools. This is somewhat surprising simply because the expectation is that interviews of the nature undertaken here might be expected to attract those most angry with the Division or most frustrated in their dealings with the Board. While the interviews did reveal such feelings of anger and frustration, they were primarily directed at particular rather than general dissatisfactions with Division practices and/or policies. These dissatisfactions are discussed in the sections which follow. Because the concerns expressed tend to be localized does not make them less important for Board consideration. Aggregated, they represent a significant dissaffection overall, and are addressed in the "Issues" section.

## School Preference

Parents were asked to identify the school which each of their children attended and the school they would prefer their children to attend. The tabulation of the responses to this question are shown in Table 3. An examination of this table shows that most parents would prefer to leave their children at the school they now attend. For those who did not wish their children to attend the current school, most wanted them to attend one of the two Spirit River Schools (28 children). This preference for centralization is well documented in the literature, but there is a small but vocal group who indicate that the smaller school is better. There were, for instance, sixteen children presently attending the two Spirit River schools whose parents would prefer to see attend one of the smaller public schools in the Division.

Three groups of students are currently being bussed by the Spirit River School Division to schools outside of the Division -- those going to Dawson Creek, those to Rolla, and those to Donnelly. Parents of those going to Dawson Creek seemed very happy with the arrangement, and a few parents whose children attend Bonanza School also indicated a preference for Dawson Creek (the interview data support this observation). Parents of children attending either Donnelly (6 families) or Rolla (7 families) were mailed questionnaires. The response rate from these parents was very poor. The parents of two children attending Rolla school indicated they were content, while of the three responses from parents whose children travel to Donnelly, one would prefer to attend Eaglesham while the other two prefer Donnelly. Two questionnaires indicated that two students presently attending Eaglesham would prefer to attend Donnelly.

Parents who responded that they would like their children to attend some other school than that currently attended gave reasons such as the following for that preference. The most common response was that they were satisfied with the school the child currently attended.

Reasons given for prefering some other school were:

1. The current school needs more teachers (14) (over half these responses were from the Eaglesham district)
2. Teachers in the school need improving (20) (nine of these complaints came from Woking)
3. Can't move to different school due to distance (16)

## Table 3

### Schools Currently Attended VS Schools Preferred To Be Attended

| Prefer to Attend<br>Currently Attend | Blueberry Creek | Bonanza | Eaglesham | Rycroft | Savanna | Spirit River Elementary | Spirit River High | Wanham | Woking | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blueberry Creek | 49 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Bonanza | 0 | 53 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Eaglesham | 0 | 0 | 127 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Rycroft | 0 | 0 | 0 | 109 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Savanna | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 107 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Spirit River Elementary | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 130 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Spirit River High | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 213 | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| Wanham | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 79 | 0 | 0 |
| Woking | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 35 | 2 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 30 |

4. Students need special classes (10)
5. Would like the option of changing schools (9)

Those parents who had children attending a school outside the Attendance Area gave two major reasons:

1. They felt that the child got a better education in the chosen school (7).
2. The chosen school had courses which were not offered in the Attendance Area school (7).

Seven parents took advantage of this space to indicate that they had no choice of schools for their child, and wanted that choice. Three indicated some kind of "unhappiness" with the school.

The interview data dealing with school preference support the questionnaire data in general. At the elementary school level, in particular, parents not only indicated that their preference was for the current school, but were also generally adamant that the present school be retained. The data from interviews relevant to this question are also pertinent to the question dealing with the number, types and quality of schools and are reported in that section.

Kindergarten parents, asked if they would like their children to attend a school other than the one they were "supposed to" were almost unanimous in wishing to send their children to the designated school. Only five parents indicated that they wished their children to attend other schools when they became school age. Two of these gave as a reason the desire that all their children could go to school together. Three indicated some kind of "unhappiness" with the designated school.

## Attendance Areas

Both sets of parents were asked whether children should be allowed to attend schools outside the "attendance area", and if so, under what conditions. Table 4 shows the responses from the two sets of parents to these questions. As can be seen, the questionnaire data indicate strong support for an "open attendance area" policy, with over 50% of the parents saying that students should be allowed to attend another school of their choice. As well, the majority of responses suggest that the Division provide transportation for students at no cost to parents or be allowed to ride on the school bus if there is room.

### Table 4

### Attendance Areas

| | Parents of School Age Children | Parents of Kindergarten Children |
|---|---|---|
| The child should not be allowed to attend a school outside of his attendance area. | 95<br>(16.9%) | 8<br>(12.5%) |
| The child should be allowed to attend an outside school, but the School Division should not allow him/her to ride the school bus. | 37<br>(6.6%) | 6<br>(9.4%) |
| The child should be allowed to attend an outside school, but should be allowed to ride on the school bus only if there is room. | 146<br>(26.0%) | 20<br>(31.3%) |
| The child should be allowed to attend an outside school, and the School Division should provide, or pay for, the transportation to the school selected. | 157<br>(28.0%) | 18<br>(28.1%) |

Conversly, there is an important minority (17%) who are opposed to children attending school outside their attendance area.

An examination of the responses to these questions by respondents from each attendance area showed that a higher proportion of parents from Blueberry Creek and Eaglesham areas answered that children should not be allowed to attend a school outside of their attendance area than did parents from other areas. Also a higher proportion of parents from the Woking, Rycroft and Bonanza areas favoured transportation to any school at the School Division's expense than did parents from other areas.

Parents written comments to this question were in four general areas:

1. students should be allowed to attend a school outside the attendance area if the parents were not satisfied with the school (48)
2. students should be allowed to go to any school if the bus goes there anyway (31)
3. parents should pay for transportation if students attend a school other than the one in the attendance area (23)
4. students should be forced to stay in their own attendance area school (21).

The interview data are extremely varied with respect to the question of attendance areas. Parents interviewed who opposed children attending the school of their parent's choice were generally opposed on the grounds that such a possibility would have two outcomes. First, they tended to see it as leading to the demise of their area school through decreased enrolment. Second, they perceived a potential decrease in quality of programs offered, particularly at the secondary level through a reduction in teaching staff.

Important to these parents, as well, was the observation that the smaller school provided greater teacher/ pupil interaction, traditional values, and a sense of community. Invariably, the oppostion was centered on the fear that "open" attendance areas would negatively affect the enrolment in the area schools. This view was particularly evident in those schools which have already seen a drop in enrolment as a result of the Donnelly and Dawson Creek bussing arrangements. At the same time, parents of children presently being bussed outside the Division and/or the attendance area indicated in the interviews that they preferred the status quo.

Interestingly, the questionnaire data suggest that parents in the Blueberry Creek and Eaglesham areas generally favour the "closed" attendance area concept. Yet there were parents in both these schools who in interviews suggested that more flexibility in the attendance area practices would allow the school to provide the kind of quality program that would attract a larger enrolment and spur active recruiting of students. Their view, although admittedly in the minority, was that such "openness" would force all the schools in the Division to provide improved educational opportunities.

## Number and Distribution of Schools

The next set of questions addressed concerns dealing with the number and distribution of schools in the Spirit River School Division. Questions were asked of both sets of parents and responses were broken down by elementary, junior high and senior high schools. Table 5 shows the reaction to this question. Responses to this question were generally the same from both groups of parents, hence the results are combined in Table 5 for ease of understanding. While a number of conclusions can be drawn from the data, it is fairly apparent that parents would not favor further centralization of schools in the Division. As can be expected, at the elementary level the indication that the current schools should be retained and even that new schools opened was stronger than at the senior levels, but even at the senior high school level only 9.6% indicated that some of the current schools could be closed.

### Table 5

### Preferences Regarding Number and Distribution of Schools

| | Elementary Schools | Junior High Schools | Senior High Schools |
|---|---|---|---|
| The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served. | 229<br>(36.6%) | 163<br>(26.1%) | 122<br>(19.5%) |
| The present schools should be retained but no new ones should be built to serve other communities. | 240<br>(38.4%) | 234<br>(38.1%) | 185<br>(29.6%) |
| One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools. | 51<br>(8.2%) | 55<br>(8.8%) | 60<br>(9.6%) |
| Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division. | 34<br>(5.4%) | 58<br>(9.3%) | 121<br>(19.4%) |

The interview data provide strong support for the questionnaire results, particularly with respect to the maintenance of the viability of the area elementary schools. Parents interviewed were generally adamant that necessary measures be taken to provide adequate staffing and programs for the schools -- at all levels -- although there was also a general recognition that in the case of very low enrolments in the upper grades other alternatives may be necessary. In such cases those parents interviewed wanted to participate in the decision-making process and expected flexibility in the ultimate decision.

In all the interviews only one parent advocated total centralization of all small schools to the larger centres. The view expressed was quite simply that the only way to provide equivalent quality education for all children in the Division is to bus them all to a central location. This parent had had a particularly difficult altercation with the Division and felt totally alienated. We mention this interview here because the concerns expressed with respect to parent-board communications were voiced frequently enough during the interviews and in the open-ended questionnaire responses to give rise to subsequent consideration in the "Issues" section of this report. When responses were examined by attendance area, those parents from the Spirit River attendance areas tended to support more centralization of schools than did those of the rural areas.

The most common written response of parents was that the children currently travelled too far on busses to go to school. This was a more common complaint for elementary students (54) than for junior (26) or senior (24) high. Other comments indicated that parents were basically satisfied with the number of elementary schools, but felt that they needed renovation, while a good number indicated that junior high (51) and senior high (66) schools should be consolidated.

## Change to Current Programs

Parents were asked if they would like to have vocational education offered at one or more high schools in the Division. The response to this question was extremely positive. Of those responding, 86.2% were in favor of offering such a program. The question as to in how many schools it should be offered was less decisive, with the same number of parents supporting the offering in a single school as in either two or three schools.

The interview data provided some additional inputs with respect to this question. A number of parents in the rural areas expressed concern with the apparent lack of breadth or programming in the smaller high schools. Their view generally was that resorting to correspondence courses was a poor alternative to providing academic subjects for high school students and that for those students who wanted vocational high school even if that meant bussing and/or possibly boarding at a centralized institution within the Division.

Parents were also asked whether they favored the option of a religion course in the school for those who wished it. By far the majority favored this: 72.2% said "yes", 24.6% said "no" and 3.2% did not respond to the question.

Written responses to this question came in three major groups:

1. Religion is the responsibility of the parents in the home (84)
2. Religion should be taught in the school (80)
3. Religion should be an option in school (51)

Again, the interview data support the quantitative results with a number of parents suggesting that such an option would demonstrate at least a "spirit of accommodation" to those parents who had placed their children in the private schools. Those interviewed who opposed the option were generally of the opinion that nothing would satisfy the private school supporters and the option would be too little and too late.

### School Bus Service

Parents were asked if any of their children used the school bus. Only 128 indicated that none of their children rode the bus. Of the rest, 310 said their children were picked up at the door, 200 indicated their children walked less than 1/2 mile, 12 said their children walked between 1/2 mile and 1 mile, and 11 said their children walked over 1 mile. The responses of parents with respect to satisfaction with school bus service are depicted in Table 6. As can be seen, about 80% of the parents responding were satisfied with each area queried. While this is by far the majority, 20% of the parents indicating dissatisfaction with the bussing arrangements is a significant number.

Those parents interviewed who claimed some unhappiness with the bussing arrangements tended to specify particular routes and routing problems. The major reason for complaint had usually to do with the length of time their childrren had to spend on the bus. The majority of these parents also were prepared to suggest solutions to the problems they described. There was a certain consistency in the nature of the suggested solutions throughtout the entire Division. On many occasions, parents felt that the provision of more (smaller) busses would be the answer and that it would not be formidable in cost nor unreasonable to do so. As well, the parents who were most vocal concerning bussing problems were also generally of the opinion that their complaints and/or suggested solutions were not given serious consideration by the Division and that "politics" played an important part in the decisions.

A number of parents who were satisfied with the bussing suggested that the reasons for their satisfaction were that they were heard and their views accepted -- for example, the reversing of routes at particular periods during the school year so that the child who rode the bus the longest didn't do so all year was seen as a particularly fair approach to dealing with the problem of providing a "first on first off" policy. In such cases it was generally the case that the Supervisor of Transportation in consultation with parents was enabled to effect the kind of arrangements which would be satisfactory to all parties. Conversely, parents who were unable to arrange for such agreements were usually quick to point out that the fault was not with the efforts of the Supervisor of Transportation but rather with the policies and practices of the Division itself. Generally, the blame was placed on what is perceived as excessively rigid Board policies regarding transportation and attendance areas.

## Table 6

## Satisfaction With School Bus Service

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The time my children spend on the school bus | 133<br>(32.2%) | 217<br>(50.9%) | 50<br>(11.7%) | 26<br>(6.1%) |
| The distance my children have to travel on the school bus | 130<br>(31.9%) | 213<br>(52.2%) | 47<br>(11.5%) | 18<br>(4.4%) |
| Routing Arrangements | 121<br>(30.5%) | 196<br>(49.4%) | 54<br>(13.6%) | 26<br>(6.5%) |

At most of the interview sites, it was not uncommon to hear some variation of the view that the quality of education -- and its delivery -- in the Spirit River School Division was dictated by the Division's transportation policies. That is, it was stated forcefully on a number of occasions that the education of Division students was a secondary concern coming somewhere behind concerns dealing with bus schedules and the desires of the residents of the larger urban areas. It was the view, for instance, of several principals and a number of parents, that the implementation of innovative programming and alternate educational delivery processes was both hampered by and secondary to Board concentration on traditional transportation operations.

In nearly every instance of expressed dissatisfaction regarding bussing, those interviewed added that their dissatisfaction was not directed toward the Supervisor of Transportation, who most parents felt was doing a very commendable job and who was perceived as attempting to respond to parental wishes under very difficult circumstances. The dissatisfaction was directed rather at perceived "political" influences and "favoritism" toward the more influential members of the community and compounded by a lack of coherence and cooperation among Board members who were generally viewed as being somewhat parochial. Interestingly, this view, in most interviews, did not include the local representative. That is the "Board", the "Division" and "Central Office Personnel" were indistinguishable in the view of the majority of those interviewed.

It was this observation, coupled with a number of other indicators that led to the development of a seventh category of "concern" derived from comments on the questionnaires and the inputs of those parents who presented themselves for interviews. We have titled this following section simply "Other Concerns", but it may well represent the most important area for consideration in many ways.

## Other Concerns

As noted, a number of concerns not specifically addressed in either the questionnaire survey or the interview schedule emerged during the course of study. Some of these have been alluded to in earlier sections of the report and are related to the general topics considered. These concerns, however, were voiced often enough to warrant highlighting in our estimation and are reported here and further developed in the "Issues" section. Their importance is underscored by the observation that they were unsolicited for the most part

### Parent/Board/Central Office Communications

Indications are that a large number of parents were not aware of, or have had little evidence to date of the Board's avowed intention to "open" communications. At the same time, it must be noted that the healthy response to the questionnaire survey and the large turnout to the interview opportunities are indicative of a desire on the part of parents in the Division "to be heard". The vast majority of the parents who came to be interviewed expressed appreciation for the opportunity. The fact that the study itself was initiated by the Board was not lost to these stakeholders. The study team was told on a number of occasions by parents that this was really the best thing that had been done in recent memory to find out what they thought. In most cases the comments also included a skeptical observation that the study findings probably wouldn't have much effect.

### Parental "Input" and Board Decisions

Many of the parents interviewed, and many unsolicited comments on the questionnaires referred to what was perceived as a long-standing inability on the part of parents to have much effect on the decisions taken by the Board. As well, most of those who were critical of parent and Board/Central Office communications were also critical of the way in which they perceived Division-wide decisions were made. In most such criticisms the reference point was to some past decision that had had some particular effect on the parent concerned. During the interviews questions were often asked as to why the Board and Central Office administrators didn't meet as a whole on regular occasions in places other than the Spirit River office. Key words in many of the comments focused on Board/Central Office decisions were words like "closed", "secretive", and "centralized".

## Services and Programs

Parental concerns with respect to such program considerations as the provision of French, Industrial Arts, Home Economics, Vocational Education and so forth have been articulated elsewhere in this report. In nearly every school, however, comments were made dealing with the perceived need for Divisional specialists in counselling and testing and measurement. In general, parents of junior and senior high school students who commented on this mentioned the need for counselling services; parents of elementary school children saw a need for specialist service in the testing or screening of children for special programs.

## RELEVANT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

### What the Literature Says About Attendance Areas

A number of studies resulting in a great deal of literature have been undertaken which address the particular issue of attendance areas. A number of side issues are encountered once one starts to study the available literature. Before the study was actually begun, we examined the available literature in the area. This process continued throughout the study. A complete discussion of the literature examined is contained in Appendix 5 for those who wish a comprehensive look at all the issues.

This section gives an overview of the literature on the following topics of concern relative to attendance areas: declining enrolments, neighborhood/community schools, quality schooling in small schools, school bussing policies and practices, decentralized vs. centralized schooling, open vs. closed attendance areas, students crossing jurisdictional boundaries, and voucher systems.

The most commonly adopted strategies for dealing with declining enrolments are: adjust attendance area boundaries, relocate programs/grade levels, establish split classes, twin or pair schools, establish special purpose open enrolment schools, develop alternate uses of excess space, close (or phase closing) schools, and share services with neighboring jurisdictions. Closing schools is considered a last resort, and should be undertaken only after careful planning and thorough investigation of all possible alternative uses of excess school space. A number of possible alternative uses are discussed in Appendix 5. School boards are advised to develop policies for the efficient use of excess school space. If closure is necessary, the public should be consulted at every step of the process. As well, new buildings should have designed in flexibility to maximize their adaptability to alternate uses at a later date.

Single-school districts face special problems in dealing with decline, since fewer options are available to them. Some possible strategies establishing regional consortiums to share lacks programs, services, and staff; increasing use of correspondence courses; combine parallelism related courses; opening electives to several grade levels; retraining or recruiting staff competent to teach several areas; and altering the school schedule to better utilize staff time and resources.

By making excess space available, declining enrolments have given impetus to the community school movement. Similarly, a backlash against centralization as a response to declining enrolments has led to the concept of the neighborhood school. Some perceived advantages of neighborhood schools: stronger feeling of belonging among students and staff, better relations among staff and administration, ease of communication, and the elimination of alienation so common in larger schools. The primary weakness of small schools is the inability to offer a varied curriculum. Because the small local school usually plays an essential role in community vitality and identity, decision to close should be studied carefully.

Small schools have to seek solutions to education problems with a view to their unique circumstances, as solutions designed for large urban systems cannot be assumed to work equally well in the small rural setting. Some strategies for improving the quality of schooling in small schools: regional service agencies as a means of organizing cooperative efforts, and providing specialized services, greater efforts to prepare teachers to work specifically in the rural setting, and the development of curriculum materials appropriate to the community in which they will be used. As well, political organization can be effective as a means of promoting the viability of small schools, and resisting closure efforts.

Bussing policies and practices are a major concern in rural systems, especially when centralization is being considered. Studies of achievement of bus transported students indicate that riding times up to ninety minutes do not significantly affect achievement. Recently developed computerized bus routing techniques can reduce the manual work involved and allow consideration of a greater number of alternatives than is possible with manual techniques. They have considerable potential for improved efficiency and reduced costs in larger systems. A number of recommendations for improving bussing practices are contained in Appendix 5.

Centralization is an important issue in rural areas, and has both strong supporters and opponents. In favor of centralization, it is argued that it helps eliminate regional disparities, ensures minimum standards are maintained in all areas, is more cost efficient, and enables better administration of education. Conversely, it is argued that decision making in centralized systems is slower, and fails to utilize knowledge of local conditions; centralization tends to reduce the opportunities for local initiatives; larger systems make it more difficult to judge the quality of educational resources; and finally, decentralization fosters competition among neighboring jurisdictions.

Voucher systems have been examined as a possible means of improving the delivery of education. Proponents of the concept visualize healthy competition, service accountability to clients, the stimulation of enthusiasm and commitment of teachers, and opportunities to develop specialist schools. Those opposed to vouchers argue that they may lead to social inequalities and elitism, to the destruction of public education, and to chaos in the marketplace; as well, parents might not be able to make the best possible choices for their children in terms of social benefits to the nation. In general, education would become turbulent, ruled by the market forces, and aimed primarily at private benefits and enterprise. Some aspects of the voucher concept, such as decentralized budgeting, school grants for special program purposes, open enrolment policies in some jurisdictions, and correspondence and home tutorial programs already exist in Alberta.

## Survey of Other Alberta School Jurisdictions

A survey of Alberta school systems was undertaken to investigate their practices, regulations, and policies in four major areas:

1. School Bussing
2. Attendance Areas
3. Centralization of Schools
4. Quality Schooling in Small Schools

Twenty-four systems were surveyed of which 15 returned their questionnaires, for a return rate of 62.5%. The survey instrument is given in Appendix 6, while a complete analysis of the results of the survey is included in Appendix 7 of this report. This section summarizes those findings.

### School Bussing

Only three respondents indicated a maximum time spent by any pupil on a bus in excess of ninety minutes. Six indicated sixty minutes or less. Nine respondents indicated a maximum distance from school before a student is eligible for bus transportation of one and a half miles, though in many cases the actual distance was less. Most respondents indicated bus service was provided to the gate. One respondent indicated a half mile maximum and two a quarter mile.

No respondents indicated having a policy or regulation regarding maximum mileage for any one bus route.

All fifteen respondents indicated some form of support for transportation for extra-curricular activities. Typically, support is provided up to certain specified limits, beyond which, the school or students must pay all or part of the costs for fuel and driver's wages. Nine respondents indicated they were involved in transporting students from other districts. These were typically administered by agreements specifying responsibility for insurance coverage, mutually agreed upon fee schedules, and terms of eligibility.

Only three respondents had some form of shared transportation agreement with other systems.

### Attendance Areas

All fifteen respondents indicated they had some form of arrangement for attendance of out-of-system students in their schools, as well as for attendance of their students in out-of-system schools. These arrangements are in most cases administered through reciprocal tuition agreements, or individual agreements, if student movement is only one way. In the case of sending systems, the Board typically covers associated costs if movement is for valid educational reasons; otherwise parents are responsible for transportation and tuition costs. In most cases, the receiving system will accomodate such students to the extent space is available. Transportation is provided only if it can be accomodated through existing bus service.

Three respondents reported some form of interchange agreement that did not involve a fee structure.

Fourteen respondents had some arrangement for movement of students between attendance areas within the system. The terms for such arrangements were generally the same as for arrangements with other systems. Movement is permitted for sound educational reasons, and provided space is available in the receiving school. Transportation is only provided on existing routes in most cases.

### Centralization of Schools

Six respondents had some form of policy specifying criteria for closing schools, three of which included formal policy statements. These were very similar in nature and contained provisions for:

- establishment in advance of some "critical minimum enrollment"
- notification of parents and ratepayer of consideration of intent to consider closure when

this point is reached

- written notification of the implications of closure
- public meetings to discuss these implications
- provision of time for concerned groups to prepare submissions
- decision on closure can only be made after the preceding steps have been adhered to.

All fifteen respondents indicated there was no policy favoring centralization or decentralization. One response was qualified, stating that they did have a long term plan stating that no further centralization would occur.

Only three respondents had a policy to balance enrollments. In these cases, attendance areas were reviewed annually by the Superintendent or the Board.

**Quality Schooling in Small Schools**

One respondent submitted a formal policy regarding minimum/maximum school size, and three informal practices were noted. There was no notable consistency among them. One reported a critical minimum of 60, another of 27. Another said it operated no one room schools.

Four formal and four informal policies were reported relating to minimum/maximum class size. These varied considerably by grade level and subject area.

Only one respondent had a policy for split classes (considered when class size falls below 12 in elementary/junior high, 10 in senior high). Four respondents indicated split classes were utilized if necessary.

One respondent had a policy for alteration or relocation of programs in response to declining enrollment (grade levels may be discontinued whenever enrollment falls below 60 in any of: grades 1-6, 7-9, or 10-12).

One policy was submitted relating to improving the quality of education in small schools. This specified lower staffing ratios for small schools. Two additional respondents indicated they had some practices in this area. These involved more aide services, more supervisory time from central office, and lower pupil - teacher ratios.

## UNDERLYING ISSUES

### Issue Identification

A major function in any policy review process is to identify the issues impacting upon the situation, because to be effective a policy must help resolve the issue or at the very least take the issue into account.

Issues can be defined in terms of the two factors contributing to their creation -- contingencies and constraints.

**Contingencies** are subject to change in the short or mid-term time frame. Those internal to the system, or under the control of the system, are relatively easy to modify. For example, a policy related to making decisions about bus routes. A contingency external to the system, or under the control of some other agency is more difficult for the system to modify, because it takes negotiations with another body. For example, the upgrading of roads to accommodate school busses.

**Constraints** are either not subject to change, or if they can be changed it is with great difficulty and in most cases over the long-term time frame. An example of an internal constraint, which can be changed, but only over a long time would be the present school facilities and school busses. External constraints which are not subject to change, especially by efforts of the school system would be the population mix of the area and the physical geography of the Division.

An analysis and interpretation of the data collected for this study revealed several issues which impart upon attendance areas, bussing and the delivery of education to the residence of the Spirit River School Division. Some of these issues can be categorized as constraints whereas others are categorized as contingencies.

### Constraint Issues not Subject to Change

The following issues are constraints to any attempt to modify attendance area, bussing or educational delivery policy. Although the issues themselves cannot be changed by the school system they must be taken into account in developing or implementing policy.

## Geographic Characteristics

There are many geographic characteristics which affect the delivery of education in the Spirit River School Division. Most of these are not subject to change, although their effects can be modified by communications and transportation technology. The natural boundaries of the Division, including the Peace River on the north, the relatively unsettled area on the south and the British Columbia border on the west all effect the assessibility to schools and the way in which education has to be delivered. The several deep valleys which affected settlement patterns and transportation routes, especially in earlier times, have created areas of relative isolation and, therefore, have had a major effect on how education has been and is delivered. The two major highways which divide the Spirit River School Division into four quadrants, affect the shopping and social movement of people, as does the presence of Dawson Creek near the western boundary and Donnelly and Falher near the eastern boundary.

### Discussion

These geographic features have effected education by creating several semi-isolated communities, which by their very nature develop strong feelings of community loyalty. At the same time the sparse population in some areas and the geographic barriers created by the rivers and the valleys have made the delivery of education more expensive and difficult. The improvement of communications and transportation, on the other hand, has changed shopping and travel patterns, and the life style of most people in the region. Therefore, a breakdown in the traditional way of life in most of the communities is taking place, including how education is structured and delivered. Conflict, both within individuals, between individuals, and between groups have, predictably, developed in respect to the centralization of the delivery of school programs and the overall philosophy of education.

These conditions cannot be readily changed, nor can the issues they give rise to, be readily resolved. Therefore, in the short term at least they can only be taken into account in developing educational policies and programs.

## Social and Cultural Characteristics

The social, cultural and economic characteristics of the population also has a major impact upon its philosophy of education, the way the people see their wants and their educational needs. These characteristics of the people in the Spirit River School Division have been shaped in part by the geography of the region, and also by the backgrounds of the various communities and the culture of the people.

### Discussion

The relative isolation of some communities, combined with the agricultural economy of the area has contributed to strong feelings of community and self reliance. The declining rural population and, therefore, the decline in school enrolments in the rural communities, combined with the sociological phenomenon of "the expanding community" -- created by the increasing ease of communications with, and transportation to, larger centres has caused great concern throughout the region. This in turn has caused the differences in educational and social philosophies to surface. On the one extreme are those who want their children to benefit from the advantages which, they believe, can only be obtained from larger schools, which can only be found in the larger centres. Maintaining the life style of the small community is not a major priority. On the other extreme are those who believe that the small community and the rural way of life has much to recommend it. This way of life will be lost if the schools are centralized further. The small communities and the small schools, they believe, must be retained. In most respects they believe the smaller community school provide a superior education.

As is the case with the geographic characteristics of the region, the social and cultural characteristics cannot be readily changed in the short term; however, they must be taken into account in developing educational policies and programs for the Division.

## Language and Religious Differences

Canadian history is rife with cases of educational conflict and problems which arise from language and religious differences. The minority language and/or religious groups attempt to further their interests through the education of the youth. If they cannot do this through the public school system -- to the extent they wish, they attempt to modify the system, establish private schools, or send their children to other jurisdictions. This in turn creates conflicts with the majority group who see the public system eroded by these moves.

These conditions exist in several communities in the Spirit River School Division.

### Discussion

The desires of the Francophone population in the Tangent area to have their children educated in the French language and culture, and the creation of private religious schools in the Wanham and Savanna areas are examples of how these language and religious differences can affect the delivery of education. In each of these cases it has caused a decline in the public school population. This decline in enrolment has affected the program and is endangering the existence of some of the schools.

Although the way in which education is delivered and whether or not students are required to go to the public schools can be modified, the underlying wants and needs created by religious and cultural differences are not readily modified. In the short-term these differences can only be taken into account in establishing educational policies and practices.

## Constraint Issues Subject to Change

The following issues are subject to change over the long term. However, in the short term there are constraints which must be taken into account in developing and implementing school attendance area, bussing and educational delivery policy.

### Location and Nature of Facilities

The presence and nature of buildings and other facilities are a constraint to changes in the educational program and its delivery. The structure and layout of buildings dictate, to a large measure, the nature of the program. The presence of buildings in a particular location also dictate,to a large measure, that educational delivery will be made to that location. In other words, it would be difficult to make major modifications in the location of educational delivery when major facilities already exist.

### Discussion

The presence of school buildings and facilities in the present centres in the Spirit River School Division make it difficult to effect major changes in attendance areas, or where new schools or school additions will be located. For example, it would be very difficult to close the schools at Savanna and Blueberry Creek and build a new one at Gordondale, even if this seemed to be the best long term solution to providing education in the west end of the Division. We are not suggesting that this is the best solution, but are only using this as an example of how the existence of facilities acts as a constraint on policies regarding delivery locations.

Although it would be possible to change the delivery of educational programs to different locations in the Spirit River School Division than those that exist now, it would be very difficult to do so, at least in the short term. Therefore, the present facilities and their location must be taken into account in developing or modifying educational policies, educational programs and their delivery. However, the nature of these facilities are open to modification.

## Composition of Bus Fleet

Modifications in transportation policy and programs are affected in large measure by the extent and nature of the bus fleet. For example, it would be difficult in the short-term to change from a few long bus routes which require large busses, to several shorter routes which require small busses. The cost would be prohibitive.

### Discussion

Any major changes in transportation policy in the Spirit River School Division and the programs developed to effect this policy would have to be implemented slowly so that modifications in the bus fleet could be made in an efficient and effective manner. In fact the Spirit River School Division is gradually changing from large to small busses. However, modifications in the transportation grants for 1984/85 may make it possible to modify practices to some extent (for example, load factor changes which provide full grants for two junior or senior high school students per seat, plus increased per deim grants for short routes).

### School Grants

The various educational grants provided by the Provincial Government, plus the regulations and traditions governing supplementary requisitions also act as constraints on the development of educational policies and programs by local school jurisdictions.

#### Discussion

The restraint program in Alberta and the reluctance of local ratepayers to see their taxes increased are certainly a constraint on the availablility of funds and, therefore, on how much money the Spirit River School Division can allocate to new programs, or to the provision of other services. It would indeed be difficult to add new programs without cutting out existing programs, or without making economies in present operations.

In developing new policies and programs account must be taken of the extent and nature of the grant program as well as the ability of the System to raise local revenues.

### Differing Philosophies of Education

Beliefs concerning the purposes of education and how education should be delivered create powerful constraints on a school board. These constraints are magnified if there are two or more strong and divergent belief systems in the community.

#### Discussion

There are at least two divergent philosophies held by substantial numbers of people in the Spirit River School Division. One position holds that the larger schools, because they have more human and material resources, can provide a richer and more varied educational experience. They also believe that their children should have the opportunities to benefit from these experiences. The inconvenience of longer bus rides is one of the disadvantages they must put up with for the sake of a better education for their children.

The other major philosophic position holds that rural communities and the rural way of life must be preserved. Children will benefit most in the long run if they can receive their education, or most of it at least, in the home community. "Small" can also be good, because it allows for the recognition of the individual and his / her place in the community. Those holding this philosophic position also believe that education can be delivered just as effectively, if not more so, and probably just as efficiently in the small commmunities where the people live.

These differing philosophies may change over time, but in the short to mid-term they both must be taken into account in the development of educational policies and programs.

## Contingency Issues

Most of the following issues can be dealt with by the school system itself in a relatively short time period. Others require the collaboration of other agencies.

### School Attendance Area Policies and Practice

The present practices in regard to a particular issue always act as a constraint in the process of considering other policies. In many respects an organization becomes relatively comfortable with its present policies and so do its participants and clients. In other words they have accommodated to the way the organization operates. Even though the policies, and the practices growing out of them, may be causing problems there will still be resistance to modifying them. People generally feel more secure with what is known, even though they may not like it, than they are with the unknown.

#### Discussion

Although most parents in the Spirit River School Division seem to be satisfied with the schools their children are attending and would not choose to send their children to other schools, there is, however, strong support for an "open attendance area" policy. On the other hand a large minority of parents believe that children should be sent to the school in their attendance area. They believe that an erosion of this policy will result in the loss of the school and, therefore, many small rural communities.

There was also a concern expressed by several parents that the Board allows some children to attend outside schools, whereas it does not allow others who seem to have equally compelling reasons. From reports received it would seem that most parents who send their children to Dawson Creek and Donnelly would like to have this privilege continued, whereas, a number of others believe that the children of the Division should be educated in the Division.

In order to develop a policy which will satisfy, to some extent at least, the interests of all of these parents, their concerns will have to be carefully considered and innovative modifications in attendance area policy developed.

## Transportation Policies and Practices

Policies on attendance areas and transportation of students are, of necessity closely related. However, there are transportation policies which are relatively unrelated to the attendance area question. For example, pick up points, order of pick up and drop off, and bus comfort and safety.

### Discussion

Although most parents were relatively satisfied with the transportation policies and practices of the Spirit River School Division, there were some concerns expressed by a fairly large minority of parents -- mainly in the interviews. These included concerns about time on the bus, comfort on the bus, the nature of the route, and the time of pick up and drop off. The major complaint of those who were concerned was the lack of information and involvement in respect to determining bussing practice in their area. These concerns should be given careful consideration in any review of transportation policies and practices. The use of computerized bus routing programs, such as those described to the Superintendent and Superintendent of Bussing also make bus routing more efficient and effective.

## The Nature of Education and its Delivery

The way people view the purposes of education and how it should be delivered will determine in large measure how they view attendance areas, transportation of students and the operation of the schools. As discussed above, the philosophies of education held by people cannot be readily changed. However, the nature of the programs and how they are delivered are more open to modifications.

### Discussion

Although most parents are satisfied with their schools they do not want to see further centralization. In fact a large minority would prefer to see more schools built. They would also like to see new programs such as vocational educational introduced into the Division's schools. There is, however, a sizeable minority who are dissatisfied with the schools, some because they do not provide the type of well rounded community education children need, nor do they take advantage of new ideas and technologies which would make it easier to deliver quality education to small numbers of students in small rural communities.

This concern about the nature of education and its delivery is probably the most important issue underlying the concerns about attendance areas and transportation. It should become a high priority issue for the Board.

## Road and Transportation Upgrading

The establishment and modification of attendance areas and bus routes depends in no small measure on the quality of the roads and the willingness of the municipal authorities to cooperate with the school authorities. However, the development of improved transportation and communications technologies can also have an effect on how attendance areas and bus routes can be modified.

### Discussion

The location and quality of the roads in the Spirit River School Division played a major role in determining the present attendance areas and bus routes. Although the roads in most areas of the Division have been improved over the years they still determine, in some cases where busses cannot travel in safety. However, the application of improved communication technologies may make it possible to modify routes and still adhere to appropriate safety standards.

## Administrative Policies and Practices

People are often as concerned about the way decisions are made and their role in the decision making process as they are with the decisions themselves. However, it is also true that people who are dissatisfied with a policy or a program will also express dissatisfaction with the process. In any case, this phenomenon can create serious problems in the operation of any organization.

### Discussion

Many of those interviewed who expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of education also expressed dissatisfaction with the planning, decision making and communication processes. However, several who were generally satisfied with the educational system also indicated some degree of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of planning, policy making and public communication. These concerns could develop into a major issue affecting all of the other issues discussed above if corrective action is not taken.

## ALTERNATIVES

Although the major purpose of the study was to examine attendance area policies, regulations and alternative possibilities, the study team was also asked, through Board approval of the proposal, to identify underlying concerns and to suggest ways of dealing with them. The study purposes state in part ". . . This has given rise to the request by the Board to have a study conducted of attendance areas, which would include the development of alternative approaches designed to improve attendance area policy and regulations and to resolve the underlying concerns and issues."

Several issues were identified which must be resolved, or at least taken into account, in developing more effective attendance area and transportation policies. These were discussed in the previous section of this report. Of these, the two most critical are the policies and practices concerning the nature of education and its delivery, and planning and administrative policies and practices. Unless some attention is given to these areas of concern any change in attendance area or transportation policies are likely to be ineffective.

### Quality Education

For the purposes of examining quality of education policies for the Spirit River School Division the study team has selected two different positions, both designed to provide equivalent opportunities for the children in all areas of the Division; however, the basis for determining equivalency are different. These two positions are *Quality Based on Conventional Standards* and *Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives.*

#### Quality Based on Conventional Standards

Policies designed to govern the quality of education, which are based on conventional standards would include provisions such as the following:

(a) Minimum standards in respect to quality factors such as school size (students and teachers), facilities, programs, courses, support services, modes of delivery, etc. would be established. In the main these would be based on Provincial Government standards, and practices found to be acceptable in other jurisdictions.

(b) These minimum standards would form the basic criteria for decisions on staffing, programs, facilities, school closures, etc. However, the wishes of the residents of the area would also be taken into consideration.

(c) A rough equivalency of educational opportunities for all children in the Division, based on the standards suggested above, would be the criteria used in establishing regulations, programs and delivery modes in respect to the quality of education.

### Implications

The policies and practices of the Spirit River School Division are similar to the alternative outlined above. The major implications of this alternative are:

(a) Pressures to centralize the delivery of education still further, especially at the junior high school level, would continue at their present levels, or might even increase. These pressures would not come from interest groups initially, but from the criteria by which the operations are judged. By definition the larger schools would have the best opportunities to provide "quality" education.

(b) The small schools, which by definition would be judged to be ineffective as well as inefficient, would gradually be closed. Closures may not result as a result of a direct decision of the Board, but because the schools would gradually wither and die "on the vine".

(c) Education would be efficient and near equality, as measured by conventional standards of dollars spent, numbers of teachers, staff / student ratios, etc. would be possible.

## Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives

The criteria which would form the basis for developing policies, which are contained in this alternative, are present to some extent in the previous alternative and in the practices of the Spirit River School Division, but they are secondary criteria. In this alternative they are primary and the conventional criteria are secondary. The following are the major criteria which could be applied in developing policies and programs in respect to the quality of education if the *Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives* alternative is adopted.

(a) The cultural and philosophical perspectives of the parents and the community, the wants and needs of the parents and the children and the wants and needs of society, as reflected in the policies and regulations of Alberta Education, would be the major criteria used in determining programs, educational delivery modes, types and locations of schools, transportation policy, etc.

(b) The programs and delivery modes would be as flexible as possible to satisfy the diverse wants and needs of the population.

(c) A multi-year operational plan (say five years) could be developed and approved by the Board. This plan would be based on the criteria discussed above.

(d) A minimum level of support for each school location, also based on the above factors, could be established and no school would be allowed to drop below these levels, regardless of the number of pupils enrolled.

(e) The operational plan would be reviewed and decisions made relative to the next multi-year plan, at least one year prior to its expiration.

(f) Equivalency of opportunities based upon the above criteria and not similarity of services based on conventional standards, would be the criteria applied in respect to providing quality education to all students in the Spirit River School Division.

### Implications

There are several implications to be considered before a decision is made to adopt all aspects of this alternative approach to providing quality education.

(a) A great deal of time, planning and community involvement would be necessary in order to implement an effective and efficient program.

(b) Cost could be substantially higher, unless programs were developed to comply with a pre-set maximum dollar range.

(c) There would probably be more variation in programs and delivery than is present now and requests for changes would be more rapid. This might result in frustrations, dissatisfactions and complaints from those teachers, administrators, Board members and parents who need high levels of order and certainty in their lives. For those who do not, the new approach to programming and delivery could bring excitement, challenge and reward.

(d) The education program and its delivery would be based on the wants and needs of children, parents and communities and the particular cultural perspectives which they hold. Therefore, there would probably be more satisfaction and less complaining from those who prefer a different perspective than the one now available. Dissatisfaction and complaints would increase from those in the Division who prefer conformity to the conventional standards.

## Planning and Administrative Decision Making

The findings and the issues in previous sections of this report point out that there is a sizeable minority of parents who expressed dissatisfaction with how decisions, which affect them and their children, are made and how communications with the public are handled. Whether or not the impressions of the concerned parents are correct is probably not as important as the fact that they have these views. In any case, the issue could become more serious unless corrective action is taken.

The study team has selected two different approaches to planning and administrative decision making to present as alternatives for the consideration of the administrators and the Board of the Spirit River School Division. These are *Administration Based on Responsibility* and *Administration Based on Involvement*. Both of these alternatives are based on the assumption of unitary structure -- a Chief Executive Officer responsible to the Board for the operation of the System. Although a dual or multiple responsibility structure might work, probably not very effectively, for the *Administration Based on Responsibility* alternative, it would not be feasible for the *Administration Based on Involvement* structure.

### Administration Based on Responsibility

The orientation placed by the study team on the concept of *Administration Based on Responsibility* follows that of the conventional "bureaucratic -- line and staff", type administrative structure. In many respects this model describes present practice in the Spirit River School Division, except that the practice is not as extreme as is the description of the "pure" model. The most relevant characteristics include the following:

(a) The administrator responsible for a function will make the decision, within the terms of Board policy and regulations.

(b) Rational considerations will be the basic criteria in making decisions; political and other types of input from interest groups or individuals will only be considered if they fall within the rational framework, or if there is no other alternative.

(c) Communications with the public and the involvement of the public in planning and decision making are not given a high priority within the rational framework as conceived by the official and his superordinates.

(d) Appeals against decisions are referred up the line until they get to the Superintendent and finally the Board.

### Implications

There are many implications to be considered in the implementation of this alternative model of planning and administrative decision making. The following are the most relevant:

(a) The lines of responsibility are clear and well known and it is relatively easy to follow the path of a decision.

(b) The wants and concerns of parents and other stakeholders may not be given the priority they might deserve.

(c) Rational inputs from the outside, including the research literature, will generally be given appropriate consideration.

(d) Complaints about lack of involvement, lack of concern for the needs and wishes of the people and about favoured treatment for others will be relatively high.

## Administration Based on Involvement

This model of planning and administrative decision making takes an orientation similar to the human relationship styles of administration contained in the literature on administrative behaviour, and similar to the normative-reeducative model of organizational change. It is also based on the assumption of a "policy" orientation to planning, programming and decision making. Its most relevant characteristics include the following:

(a) Those most effected by a plan or a decision should be involved in the planning or the decision making, and their welfare and their needs given foremost priority.

(b) Decision making should be located as close to the source of action as possible.

(c) Responsibility for planning and decision making should be given to those most competent to carry out the function.

(d) Those who are affected by a plan or a decision should have ready access to information relative to the decision or planning area and should have ample opportunity to consider all of the relevant information and to have their views expressed before the decision is made.

(e) A broad set of policies — guides to discretionary action, established by the Board, should form the bases of decisions made by the superintendent, principals and teachers.

### Implications

The *Administration Based on Involvement* model probably has implications more difficult to deal with than does the other model presented. This is due, in part, to the fact that the model and its practices are less well known to, and understood by, most people.

(a) This model can be effective only if the administrators and the Board really believe in involvement and diversity and are willing to live with the uncertainty these create.

(b) There would be more discussion, debate and disagreements than probably exist at present, but there would also be less lingering suspicion and bitterness.

(c) More program decisions would be made at the school and teacher levels than would be the case in a purely rational system.

(d) There would be more satisfaction on the part of most stakeholders, because they would be involved in the planning, or at least have their opinions expressed and their views taken into consideration. They would also be given more information about the area under consideration. However, there may be more dissatisfaction and complaints from those who prefer a more predictable process and who hold strong positions they are committed to implement.

(e) Policies, regulations and programs would be more in line with the wants of the people than they might be under the purely rational model.

(f) In the short-term administrative costs might be higher, the time spent on planning and decision making, higher pressures on administrators and the Board greater, however, in the mid to long-term the stress may be less because of increased satisfaction with the process and its results.

(g) Initial attempts at involvement may be less than satisfactory, as was the case in a few instances in the Spirit River School Division, however, persistence will bring success as people realize that the system is honest and as they gain more experience in an involvement orientation.

## School Attendance Areas

Concerns about school attendance areas, and the related concern about student transportation were the major motivating factors which prompted the Board to commission this study. Therefore, these issues will be given the greatest emphasis in this report; however, it should be kept in mind that the two issues discussed above -- *Quality Education and Planning* and *Administrative Decision Making*, are considered, by the study team, to be crucial. If these issues are not adequately dealt with modifications in attendance areas or transportation policies will be of little consequence.

Four orientations to attendance area policies, which can be considered along a continuum from "closed" to "open" are presented for the consideration of the Board. They are *Closed Attendance Areas, Semi-Closed Attendance Areas, Semi-Open Attendance Areas,* and *Open Attendance-Areas*

### Closed Attendance Areas

A closed attendance area is defined by the study team to mean that:

(a) Parents in the Division must send their children to the school retained for a relatively long period of time (eg. five years).

(b) Children are not allowed to attend another school in the Division, or outside of the Division, unless recommended, for health or program reasons, by the appropriate school official or a medical practitioner.

(c) Transportation to a school outside of the attendance area designated will be provided, or paid for, only for those children who have been approved to attend the school.

(d-1) Schools outside of the Division will be open for the same consideration as are schools within the Division, or as an option which is more closed,

(d-2) Schools outside of the Division will be considered only for health reasons, or for dissadvantaged students who cannot be provided the appropriate opportunities in the Division.

### Implications

In many respects this alternative is similar to the present set of policies followed by the Spirit River School Division. However, there are some aspects of the *Semi-Closed* alternative which are also in practice in Spirit River. The following are the most relevant implications of such a set of policies.

(a) The policy is easy to administer and relatively efficient, once the attendance areas have been determined. Efficiency would also be easier to maintain, because of the lack of flexibility in boundaries and the long time frame.

(b) The planning and operation of school programs, staffing and transportation would be easier and probably more efficient because of the long time frame without major modifications.

(c) Inconveniences and hardships would probably occur for individual students and families because of the lack of flexibility and the long time frame.

(d) Dissatisfactions with the System and complaints about it would probably increase because of the limitations placed on parent and student choices.

### Semi-Closed Attendance Areas

The orientation in the *Semi-Closed Attendance Area* alternative is similar to the one for the *Closed Attendance Area*, except that there are more options open for students and parents.

(a) Parents are expected to send their children to the schools in their established attendance area; however, they can send their children to other schools if approved for health, program and a limited range of other personal reasons, if there is room in the school selected and if the principal is willing to accept them.

(b) Transportation will be provided only if there is room on the bus, except for students who have been approved for health and program reasons. In these cases transportation will be provided on the same basis as for children attending schools in their own attendance area.

(c) Policies in respect to schools outside of the Division could be the same as for the *Closed Attendance Area* alternative.

### Implications

The same implications will apply as for the *Closed Attendance Area* alternative; however, the efficiencies will not be as marked because of the greater possibility of modifications from year to year; nor will the dissatisfactions and complaints be quite as extreme, because of the opportunities for some parental and student choice.

## Semi-Open Attendance Areas

Although attendance areas are established to indicate where parents would ordinarily send their children, the orientation of this alternative is to parental and student choice.

(a) Parents can send their children to any school in the Division outside of the established attendance area if they inform the Board prior to June 1 of the previous school year, and if there is room in the school. However, in this alternative the principal of the receiving school would have to justify, to the Board, that there was not room in the school.

(b) Transportation routes would not be changed to accommodate students from outside of the attendance area, but transportation would be provided if they come to the nearest pick up point.

(c) Attendance areas would be set for three or four years. The review at the end of this time would take into account changes in attendance patterns.

### Implications

The implications in adopting this alternative would be more difficult to deal with than for the first two alternatives presented, because of the flexible features built in and because of the relative inexperience of most educators in operating flexible systems.

(a) in the short-term some inefficiencies and extra costs may occur because of the flexibility of the alternative and because of the possibility of annual modifications in attendance patterns.

(b) High priority, in the short-term, would have to be given to innovative planning in order to develop effective and efficient programs and regulations in respect to school programs, facilities, staffing and delivery modes.

(c) Fewer dissatisfactions and complaints would be voiced by those who prefer standardization of opportunities. Complaints about inefficiencies and high costs may also increase, especially in the short-term.

(d) A wider range of opportunities, in terms of parental and student wants and needs would be provided by this alternative.

### Open Attendance Areas

This alternative is similar to the *Semi-Open* alternative just described; however, fewer restrictions are imposed.

(a) Although attendance areas are established every three or four years, they are used merely as a guide to parents and to the administration of the Division.

(b) Parents who want to send their children to schools outside of the established attendance area must inform the Board by June 1 of the previous school year.

(c) For efficiency reasons, some parents who elect to send their children to a school outside of their attendance area may be asked to transport their children to the nearest pick up point. If this distance is more than _____ mile(s) a transportation allowance will be provided by the Board.

#### Implications

The implications for this alternative would be similar to those for the *Semi-Open* alternative discussed above. However:

(a) More flexible planning would be necessary in all aspects of school operations and student transportation.

(b) In order to maintain viable operations schools would have to be prepared to pay more attention to parent and student needs and wants and to the quality of their programs. However, there may not be as much movement of children outside of their designated attendance area would be very small -- probably less than three percent.

(c) There would be fewer dissatisfactions and complaints because parents would have almost a free choice in respect to the school their children would attend. However, complaints from those who place a high priority on efficiency and conformity would probably increase.

## Transportation

The policies governing the transportation of students must, of necessity, be closely related to policies on attendance areas and quality of education. Therefore, the two orientations selected for presentation in this report are similar, philosophically, to those presented in the attendance area and the quality of education alternatives.

### Student Oriented Transportation

Although it might be difficult to conceive of a student transportation policy which is not student oriented, in practice such policies are often oriented to efficiency, established programs, ease of administration, or other system or adult goals. A student oriented alternative must have as its major purpose the welfare of the students it is designed to transport. The major characteristics could include the following.

(a) The first consideration in establishing transportation routes and regulations would be the safety, well being and comfort of students and the wants and needs of the children and their parents. Regulations might include ones such as:

-- no elementary school student will be required to ride for more than thirty minutes going to or from school, no junior high student will be required to ride for more than forty minutes and no high school student for more than one hour.

-- no more than two students will be required to sit on one seat.

-- no student will have to travel more than one half mile from his gate to the nearest pick up point.

-- whenever one or more of these conditions cannot be met the parents will be provided with an allowance sufficient to provide equivalent service.

(b) The application of these principles will be made in the most efficient way possible.

(c) Bus routes will be recommended by the Superintendent of Transportation and the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction to a Transportation Committee composed of the Superintendent of Schools, one or more Board members, including the Board member from the area involved, the school principal involved and one or two parents from the area under consideration.

(d) Appeals from parents or communities will be to the principal of the school, then to the Superintendent of Schools and, if necessary, to the Board.

### Implications

There are several implications which should be considered carefully if this alternative is selected.

(a) Priority, in the short term, would have to be given to the development of innovative programs for bus routing, comfort and safety; otherwise costs could increase substantially.

(b) The welfare and comfort of students would be enhanced and concerns and complaints from parents would diminish.

(c) There would be fewer complaints about lack of involvement in establishing transportation routes and regulations.

(d) Dissatisfactions and complaints would increase, in the short term, from those who give a higher priority to costs and efficiency than to the well being of students.

## Efficiency Oriented Transportation

To some extent the *Efficiency Oriented* alternative is represented in the present transportation policies of the Division; however there is also some aspects of the *Student Oriented* approach. The major characteristics of the alternative include the following:

(a) The first criteria in establishing transportation programs and regulations will be efficiency.

(b) The regulations and minimum standards established by Alberta Education in respect to safety, load factors, distance to pick up and drop off points, travel times and distances, etc. will be adopted as the policy of the Board. In cases where regulations do not exist the most efficient practices will be adopted.

(c) Bus routes will be established and modified by the Superintendent of Transportation and appeals will be to the Superintendent of Schools and then, if necessary, to the Board.

### Implications

The following are the most relevant implications which should be considered if the "efficiency oriented" alternative is adopted:

(a) This alternative would be the most efficient, at least from the point of view of monetary expenditures.

(b) The comfort and well being of students would suffer and the number of complaints would increase as a result.

(c) Complaints about lack of involvement in establishing transportation routes and regulations would increase.

## Conclusions

A presentation of the full range of alternative orientations and policies for dealing with the issue areas contained in this report would fill several pages. Therefore, the study team selected only those which they believed to be most feasible for the Spirit River School Division. Also, in discussing each alternative orientation only the most relevant features and implications were presented.

The orientations presented in this report represent a range, or in most cases the extreme ends of a continuum, of feasible alternatives from the most closed and rigid to the most open and flexible. It is not feasible or appropriate to expect the Board to adopt any of the orientations in its entirety, at least not in the short-term. Rather, in considering the policy questions raised in the report the Board may choose to adopt an overall orientation in each area and then proceed to move toward it in easy stages.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Specific recommendations in respect to policies, regulations and programs will not be made in this report. These are matters for the Board and its officials to determine. However, recommendations respecting "orientation to action" based on the literature reviewed, practices in Alberta and elsewhere, the situation in Spirit River and the findings of the study will be presented for the consideration of the Board. A process for considering the report and for implementing the recommendations selected is also suggested.

### Quality Education

The variations in communities, the isolation of some communities, the variations in school size, and the overall differences in orientations of the people in the region would suggest that the *Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives* alternative would be the most appropriate for the Spirit River School Division. Although on first consideration this alternative may seem impossible, too costly and a placation to the malcontents and complainers, it is probably the alternative which would best meet the long term need of the people of the area. This orientation favours the development of programs and delivery mechanisms which would meet the needs and wants of a wide variety of interest groups and people who hold different philosophical positions.

The success of this orientation would depend on the commitment of the Board and its staff. In the short-term, priority would have to be given to developing and testing appropriate innovative programs and delivery mechanisms. Many such programs exist and others could be developed. Although funding support for developing such programs is more difficult to get now than it was a few years ago, funds are still available. The process of converting to this orientation would be slow. It would involve much planning and community involvement and many innovative pilot projects would be necessary. However, this period "change over" would be both exciting and rewarding.

### School Attendance Area

The *Open Attendance Area* alternative would seem the most appropriate, in the long-term, for the Spirit River School Division, especially if the *Quality Based on Student Needs and Cultural Perspectives* alternative, discussed above, is adopted. The fear, held by many parents in the area, that an open policy would hasten the demise of the rural community and its way of life, is unlikely to become a reality. Experience elsewhere would suggest that the demise of rural communities are caused by factors other than the closing of the school. In fact, the school is generally the last to go -- often after the community is already dead. This does not mean to suggest, however, that the nature of an educational program in an area has no effect on the way of life in a community. School programs can, and do, have a significant impact on a community and its life style. The quality of education alternative recommended would allow, and encourage, community based educational programs.

The fear that an open policy would result in the demise of the rural community should be further relieved by the findings of this study. A very small number of parents, probably less than three percent would take advantage of an open attendance area policy by sending their children to another school. However, the large majority still want this option.

An open policy would also meet more of the needs and wants of students and parents and would minimize injustices. It would also act as a motivator to schools to continue their practice of making special efforts to meet the wants and needs of their communities.

### Transportation

The *Student Oriented Transportation* alternative is also suggested to the Board, especially if the other recommended orientations in this report are adopted. The variations in conditions and the distances travelled suggest an innovative, student oriented approach, as the most appropriate for the Division.

To ensure that the implementation of such a policy does not cost substantially more than the present practices it is recommended that a comprehensive study of innovative transportation practices be undertaken. The study team has already provided the Division with suggestions for the application of computer models for bus routing. As with the implementation of the other alternatives suggested in this report, the development of appropriate procedures and the implementation of these will involve a lengthy process of public involvement, study and the introduction of pilot projects.

## Planning and Administrative Decision Making

The *Administration Based on Involvement* alternative seems most appropriate for the Spirit River School Division, especially if the other recommended orientations are adopted. In fact, if the Board did adopt the other recommended orientations, administration based on involvement would be the only workable alternative. It should be kept in mind, however, that such an orientation involves more time and more work on the part of the administrators of the Division. It also means that more program decisions would have to be made at the school level. The Board would also -- as they should -- limit their involvement to the policy level. In implementing this orientation, as should be the case with all complex changes, a start must be made with present practices and changes must be made in stages.

## Suggestions for Considering the Report and Implementing Decisions

It is recommended that this report be given wide distribution throughout the Division and that procedures for its consideration be established and well publicized. Procedures such as the following are suggested:

(a) An overall planning committee consisting of representatives of the Board, the Superintendent of Schools, principals, teacher, students and parents could be established to oversee the consideration process and prepare a final report, including recommendations, for the Board. To be effective this committee should have no more than twelve members.

(b) The Planning Committee could establish a set of task forces to study and make recommendations on the various areas contained in this report. Each task force should have on its membership a wide representation of people who are interested and competent in the area under consideration. No task force should have more than eight or ten members. Terms of Reference for the task forces should be clear and deadlines for reporting should be set.

(c) Hearings before the Planning Committee should be held and briefs requested and welcomed. This procedure would ensure opportunities for broad involvement, which would be necessary for the success of the operation.

(d) Although most of the work should be done by local people it may be desirable to involve external consultants from time to time.

(e) If possible the Board should place a moratorium of decisions, relevant to the issues raised in this report, until the Planning Committee has completed its work and made its recommendations.

(f) The development and implementation of the specific policies and programs growing out of the work of the Planning Committee should be done slowly, and primarily through the project mode of operation.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 - Request for Proposal and Proposal

This appendix contains two parts:

Request for Proposal ........................................ 61

Proposal ........................................ 63

Spirit River School Division No. 47

Box 99
SPIRIT RIVER, ALBERTA
T0H 3G0
Phone 864-3741

BLUEBERRY CREEK
BONANZA
EAGLESHAM
RYCROFT
SAVANNA
SPIRIT RIVER
WANHAM
WOKING

April 25, 1983

Dr. Ernie Ingram,
Dept. of Ed. Admin.,
University of Alberta,
EDMONTON, Alberta.

Dear Dr. Ingram:

RE: ATTENDANCE AREA STUDY - SPIRIT RIVER

Further to our discussions on the above matter I wish to confirm that the Board requests a study of Attendance Areas in the Spirit River School Division with recommendations for improvement.

Such a study must:-

1. Review existing policies and practices relative to Attendance Areas in this School Division .
2. Review current literature and practices relative to Attendance Areas in other areas.
3. Meet with interested parents, Board Members and Administrators to discuss this matter.
4. Analyze existing policies in the light of the above and
5. Make recommendations (with alternatives) to the Board that will result in improvements to present practices.

As discussed during our phone conversation I agree that prior to your undertaking of the study, you would present to the Board a preliminary outline of the approach you intend to take. Included in this preliminary presentation would be cost and time estimates for the study. Your costs up to this point (including travel and subsistence costs to Spirit River) will be borne by the Board.

For your information the May meeting of the Board will be held on Thursday May 19, 1983. It would be appreciated if the results of the preliminary study could be presented then. Please contact me if you have any questions or if you require further information.

Yours very truly,

Larry Naidoo
Superintendent of Schools

PHN:ldz

# A Study of Attendance Area Policies

a

Proposal

Submitted to

The Spirit River School Division #47

by

E.J. Ingram
T.C. Montgomerie
K.L. Ward

Department of Educational Administration
University of Alberta

May, 1983

## A Study of Attendance Area Policies

### Rationale

On April 29, 1983 a letter was received from the Superintendent of Schools of the Spirit River School Division informing the authors of this proposal that the Board would like a study conducted of the "Attendance Areas in the Spirit River School Division with recommendations for improvements," and inquiring as to our interest in conducting the study. This letter was a follow-up to two previous telephone conversations.

The authors of this proposal would be interested in conducting the study if an agreement can be reached on: (1) the objectives, (2) design, (3) time, and (4) costs.

### Purpose and Objectives

It is our understanding that certain concerns and issues have surfaced in the Spirit River School Division which have an impact upon, or are themselves impacted by, attendance area policies and regulations. This has given rise to the request by the Board to have a study conducted of attendance areas, which would include the development of alternative approaches designed to improve attendance area policies and regulations and to resolve the underlying concerns and issues.

### Study Objectives

The study team has identified several objectives directed to accomplish the purpose of the study. The objectives of the study team would be to:

1. identify the underlying concerns and issues related to the decision to study attendance areas;

2. investigate the context of the study (policies, regulations, demographic features, structures and programs of the Spirit River School Division);

3. review the literature in the areas of concern and survey the practices of similar school jurisdictions in Alberta;

4. identify the concerns, issues, wants, needs and attitudes of stakeholders groups in the Spirit River School Division (e.g., Board members, administrators, teachers, students, parents and ratepayers in respect to attendance area policies and the underlying concerns and issues;

5. develop alternative policies, regulations or programs which could improve attendance area policies and help resolve the underlying concerns and issues; and

6. report to the Board on the conduct and findings of the study and the recommendations growing out of the study.

## Design of the Study

The detail design of the study cannot be completed until a preliminary investigation of the concerns, issues and context of the study has been completed. However, the following represents the probable approach.

1. Identification of the underlying issues and concerns through interviews with relevant stakeholder representations (e.g., Board members, administrators, principals, teachers, students, parents and ratepayers).

2. Review of the relevant information on the policies and operations of the Spirit River School Division, through a study of records, reports and other documents.

3. Identification of the wants, needs, beliefs and concerns of relevant stakeholders through a combination of interviews and questionnaires (e.g., Board members, administrators, teachers, students, parents and ratepayers).

4. Identification of relevant policies and practices through a review of the literature and a survey of other similar school systems.

5. The development of appropriate recommendations through the application of various policy analysis techniques.

## Phasing and Timing

It is proposed that the study be conducted in six overlapping phases:

### Phase 1: Mobilization

- Finalizing the design and contract
- Engaging and orienting researchers

### Phase 2: Context Identification

- Investigating the demography, structures, operations, etc. of the Division
- Identifying underlying concerns and issues

### Phase 3: Literature Review and School Systems Survey

- Reviewing relevant studies in the literature
- Surveying practices in other systems

Phase 4: Wants and Needs

- Surveying wants, needs, concerns, etc. in the Spirit River School Division

Phase 5: Development of Alternatives

Phase 6: Reporting

Figure 1 contains our present estimate of the timing for the study.

## Project Management

The study will be conducted by Drs. E.J. Ingram, T.C. Montgomerie and K.L. Ward, professors in the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta. One or more graduate students will assist this study team in reviewing the literature and analyzing the data. Progress reports will be made to the Board in October and February. The final report will be presented by April 15, 1984.

## Cost Estimates

Final cost estimates cannot be made until decisions are made relative to the magnitude of the data collection in Spirit River (e.g., interviews, surveys, document reviews). However, the following estimates should be relatively close:

| Budget Item | Actual Cost | Costs charged to Spirit River School District |
|---|---|---|
| Personnel | | |
| 1. Sr. Researchers | $8,250[1] | $4,500[2] |
| 2. Jr. Researchers | 1,975 | 500[3] |
| 3. Clerical | 700 | 700 |
| Travel and Subsistence | 2,300[4] | 1,100[5] |
| Computer Time | 500 | |
| Supplies, Postage, Telephone | 100[6] | 100 |
| Total | $14,825 | $6,900 |

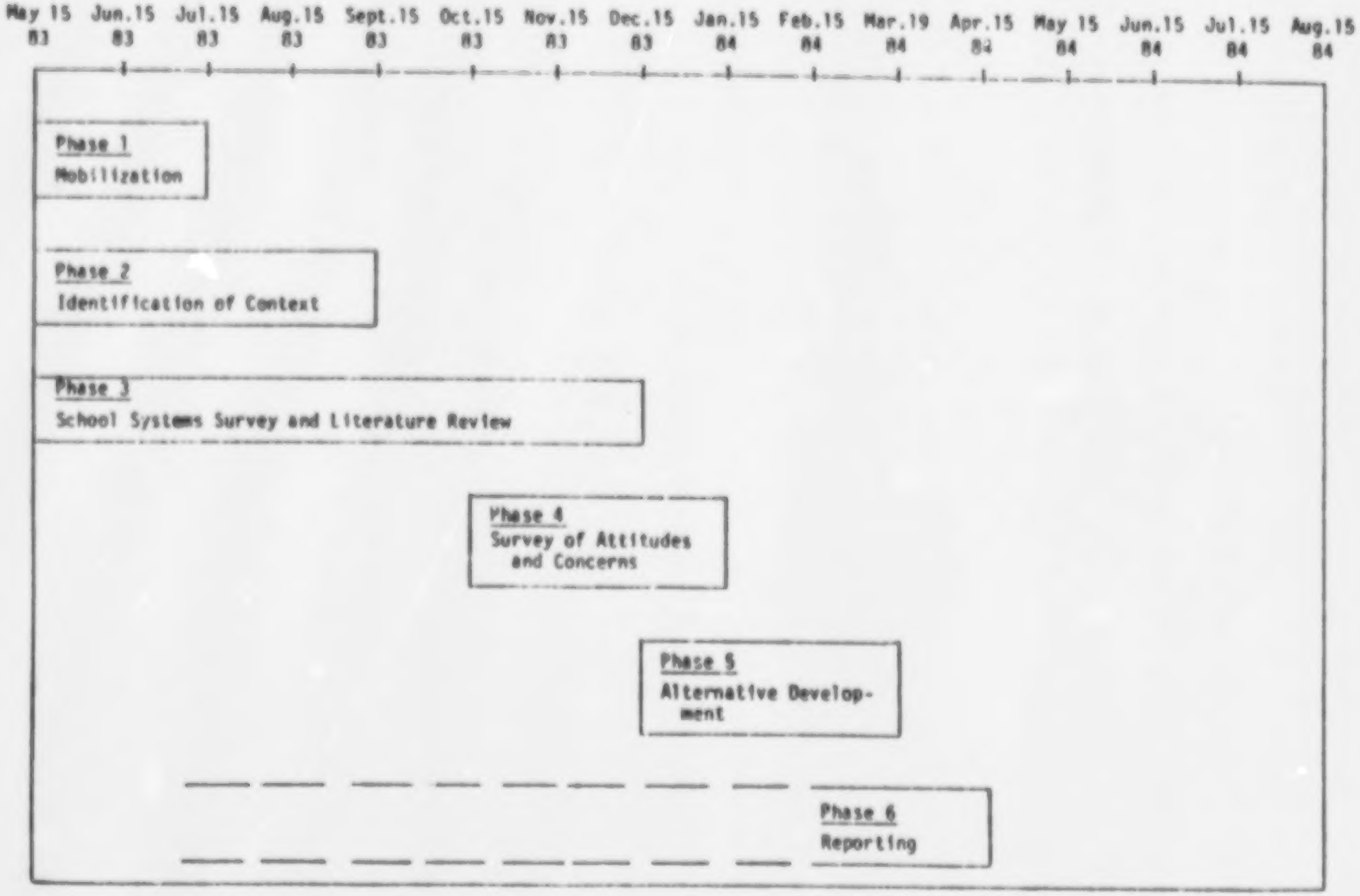

Figure 1. Spirit River Attendance Area Study - Phasing and Timing

Budget Notes

1. 30 days @ $275 (proposal development, contract negotiations, literature review, document reviews, alternative development, interviewing, report preparation and presentations).

2. Some of the work connected with the study can be considered as part of the academic work of staff members involved in teaching project design and management. Therefore, only the costs of additional time are being charged to the Board.

3. The junior researcher will use part of this experience for credit in his graduate program, therefore, only a minimum charge will be made for his services.

4. This is based on three one-day trips to Spirit River by the three senior researchers.

5. Two of the trips to Spirit River will be made while the researchers are in Grande Prairie instructing in the Extended Campus M.Ed. Program, therefore, only the additional costs will be charged to the Board.

6. This figure is based on the assumption that the Spirit River School Division will print and mail the questionnaires and reports.

## Appendix 2 - Questionnaires to Parents

This appendix contains two parts:

Questionnaire for Parents of Kindergarten Students ........ 71

Questionnaire for Parents of School Age Students ........ 75

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

## Survey of Kindergarten Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

*This survey is being conducted by the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta as part of a larger study which is being carried out on behalf of the Spirit River School Division #47.*

Research Team:
E.J. Ingram
K.L. Ward
T.C. Montgomerie

January 1984

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

### Survey of Kindergarten Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

For
Office
Use
Only

Card 1

1. Please name the kindergarten your child (children) is attending ___________ 11

2. Please check the school attendance area (the school you are "supposed" to send your children to, whether or not you have children attending this school?

   a. Blueberry Creek _____ 12
   b. Bonanza _____ 13
   c. Eaglesham _____ 14
   d. Rycroft _____ 15
   e. Savanna _____ 16
   f. Spirit River (Elementary or High School) _____ 17
   g. Wanham _____ 18
   h. Woking _____ 19

3. Would you prefer to send your child (children) now in kindergarten to an elementary school other than the one you are supposed to go to? 20
   Yes ___ No ___

4. If you answered yes above

   a. which school _____ 21
   b. why would you make this choice

   ______________________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________________

5. Do you have any children attending school? 22
   Yes ___ No ___

6. If any of your children are not attending the school they are "supposed" to attend, why did you make the decision to send them to a different school?

   ______________________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________________

7. How will your child (children) now attending kindergarten get to school? (Check one, plus travel time)

| **Child** | **School Bus** | **Other Vehicle** | **Walk** | **Other (Specify)** | **Travel Time for Round Trip** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child a | | | | | | 23-29 |
| Child b | | | | | | 30-36 |
| Child c | | | | | | 37-43 |

8. If a parent wishes his/her child to attend a school outside of the school attendance area Check only one of the following responses:

   a. The child should not be allowed to attend a school outside of his attendance area _____ 44

   b. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school but the School Division should not allow him/her to ride the school bus _____ 45

   c. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school, but should be allowed to ride on the school bus only if there is room _____ 46

   d. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school and the School Division should provide, or pay for, the transportation to the school selected _____ 47

   e. Other response (please specify)

   ______________________________

   ______________________________

   ______________________________

9. In respect to the number and distribution of schools serving the people of the Spirit River School Division, please select the one option for each of the three levels which best fits your beliefs.

   a. Elementary Schools. (Gr. 1-6) - Select only one of the following

      1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served _____ 48

      2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities _____ 49

      3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools _____ 50

      4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division _____ 51

      5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

      ______________________________

      ______________________________

      ______________________________

b. Junior High School (Gr. 7-9), select only one of the following:

1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served _____ 52

2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities _____ 53

3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools _____ 54

4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division _____ 55

5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

c. Senior High School (Gr. 10-12). Select only one of the following.

1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served _____ 56

2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities _____ 57

3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools _____ 58

4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division _____ 59

5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

10. Would you like to have vocational education offered in one or more than one, high school(s) in your School Division? 60

Yes ___ No ___

a. One school _____ 61

b. Two Schools _____ 62

c. Three Schools _____ 63

d. Should residential facilities be provided? 64

Yes ___ No ___

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

## Survey of Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

*This survey is being conducted by the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta as part of a larger study which is being carried out on behalf of the Spirit River School Division #47.*

Research Team:
E.J. Ingram
K.L. Ward
T.C. Montgomerie

January 1984

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

### Survey of Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

For
Office
Use
Only

Card

1. Please check the school attendance area (the school you are "supposed" to send your children to) whether or not you have children attending this school?

   a. Blueberry Creek _____ 11

   b. Bonanza _____ 12

   c. Eaglesham _____ 13

   d. Rycroft _____ 14

   e. Savanna _____ 15

   f. Spirit River (Elementary or High School) _____ 16

   g. Wanham _____ 17

   h. Woking _____ 18

2. Please identify the grade level of each of your children presently attending school along with the school each attends. If you would prefer any, or all, of your children to attend a different school identify the school(s) you would like each to attend if it were possible and convenient for them to do so.

| Child (do not give names) | Grade Level of Child | School Child Attends | School You Would Prefer Child to Attend | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child a | | | | 19-25 |
| Child b | | | | 26-32 |
| Child c | | | | 33-39 |
| Child d | | | | 40-46 |
| Child e | | | | 47-53 |
| Child f | | | | 54-60 |
| Child g | | | | 61-67 |
| Child h | | | | 68-74 |

   a. If you would prefer to send one or more of your children to a school other than the one they are now attending please list the reasons below.

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

b. Although you may wish your child (children) to attend another school, what is the maximum travel time (both ways, in minutes) you would accept for your child to attend this school? _____ 75-78

c. If any of your children are not attending the school they are "supposed" to attend, why did you make the decision to send them to a different school?

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

Card 2

d. For each of the children identified in question 2 above, "Child a" to "Child h", indicate how they usually get to and from school and how many minutes the round trip takes (check one mode for each child)

| Child | School Bus | Other Vehicle | Walk | Other (Specify) | Travel Time for Round Trip | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child a | | | | | | 11-17 |
| Child b | | | | | | 18-24 |
| Child c | | | | | | 25-31 |
| Child d | | | | | | 32-38 |
| Child e | | | | | | 39-45 |
| Child f | | | | | | 46-52 |
| Child g | | | | | | 53-59 |
| Child h | | | | | | 60-66 |

3. Please check the appropriate response in respect to school bus service

a. None of my children use the school bus _____ 67

b. My children catch the school bus at my gate / door _____ 68

c. My children must go:

1) less than 1 / 2 mile _____ 69

2) 1 / 2 mile to 1 mile _____ 70

3) over 1 mile _____ 71

to catch the school bus.

4. If any of your children ride the school bus please check the response which best represents your level of satisfaction with each of the following:

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. the time my children spend on the school bus | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 72 |
| b. the distance my children have to travel on the bus | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 73 |
| c. routing arrangements | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 74 |

5. If a parent wishes his/her child to attend a school outside of the school attendance area (the school they are "supposed" to attend) what would be your response?

a. The child should not be allowed to attend a school outside of his attendance area ____ 75

b. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school but the School Division should not allow him/her to ride the school bus ____ 76

c. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school, but should be allowed to ride on the school bus only if there is room ____ 77

d. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school and the School Division should provide, or pay for, the transportation to the school selected ____ 78

e. Other response (please specify)

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

Card 3

6. In general how satisfied are you with the school(s) your children are attending? Please check one response for each of the children you identified in question (2) above.

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child a | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 11 |
| Child b | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 12 |
| Child c | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 13 |
| Child d | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 14 |
| Child e | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 15 |
| Child f | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 16 |
| Child g | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 17 |
| Child h | ______ | ______ | ______ | ______ | 18 |

7. The School Act allows a school board to provide religious instruction for those who desire this option. Would you be in favour of the school board providing this option in your school for those who wish it 19

Yes ___ No ___

a. Comments

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

8. In respect to the number and distribution of schools serving the people of the Spirit River School Division, please select the one option for each of the three levels which best fits your beliefs.

a. Elementary Schools. (Gr. 1-6) - Select only one of the following

1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served _____ 20

2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities _____ 21

3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools _____ 22

4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division _____ 23

5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

b. Junior High School (Gr. 7-9), select only one of the following:

1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served _____ 24

2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities _____ 25

3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools _____ 26

4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division _____ 27

5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

c. Senior High School (Gr. 10-12). Select only one of the following.

1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served ____ 28

2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities ____ 29

3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools ____ 30

4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division ____ 31

5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

9. Would you like to have vocational education offered in one, or more than one, high school(s) in your School Division? 32

Yes ___ No ___

a. One school ____ 33

b. Two Schools ____ 34

c. Three Schools ____ 35

d. Should residential facilities be provided? 36

Yes ___ No ___

10. Best features of the school(s) my children are attending

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

11. Areas in need of improvement in the school(s) my children are attending

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

12. GENERAL COMMENTS
Are there other concerns or comments you would like to make about the areas covered by this questionnaire?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

## Appendix 3 - Tabulation of Results of Questionnaires to Parents

This appendix contains two parts:

Tabulation of Responses to Questionnaire for Parents of Kindergarten Students .......................82

Tabulation of Responses to Questionnaire for Parents of School Age Students .......................87

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

## Survey of Kindergarten Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

*This survey is being conducted by the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta as part of a larger study which is being carried out on behalf of the Spirit River School Division #47.*

Research Team:
E.J. Ingram
K.L. Ward
T.C. Montgomerie

January 1984

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

### Survey of Kindergarten Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

1. Please name the kindergarten your child (children) is attending
    - a. Blueberry Creek *2*
    - b. Bonanza *2*
    - c. Eaglesham *8*
    - d. Rycroft *11*
    - e. Savanna *9*
    - f. Spirit River *21*
    - g. Wanham *6*
    - h. Woking *5*
2. Please check the school attendance area (the school you are "supposed" to send your children to, whether or not you have children attending this school?
    - a. Blueberry Creek *2*
    - b. Bonanza *2*
    - c. Eaglesham *8*
    - d. Rycroft *11*
    - e. Savanna *9*
    - f. Spirit River *20*
    - g. Wanham *6*
    - h. Woking *6*
3. Would you prefer to send your child (children) now in kindergarten to an elementary school other than the one you are supposed to go to?
    Yes *5* *(7.9%)* No *58* *(92.1%)*
4. If you answered yes above, which school
    - a. Blueberry Creek *1*
    - b. Rycroft *1*
    - c. Spirit River *3*
    - d. Silver Valley Christian *1*
    - e. why would you make this choice

5. Do you have any children attending school?
Yes *62 (96.9%)* No *2 (3.1%)*

6. If any of your children are not attending the school they are "supposed" to attend, why did you make the decision to send them to a different school?

7. How will your child (children) now attending kindergarten get to school? (Check one, plus travel time)

| | School Bus | Other Vehicle | Walk | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blueberry Creek | 1.00<br>(50.00%) | 1.00<br>(50.00%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Bonanza | 0.50<br>(25.00%) | 1.50<br>(75.00%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Eaglesham | 4.00<br>(50.00%) | 3.50<br>(43.75%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.50<br>(6.25%) |
| Rycroft | 5.50<br>(50.00%) | 1.50<br>(13.64%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 4.00<br>(36.36%) |
| Savanna | 4.00<br>(44.44%) | 5.00<br>(55.56%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Sp. River Elem. | 10.50<br>(50.00%) | 3.50<br>(16.67%) | 3.00<br>(14.29%) | 4.00<br>(19.05%) |
| Sp. River High | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Wanham | 3.00<br>(50.00%) | 3.00<br>(50.00%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Woking | 3.00<br>(60.00%) | 1.50<br>(30.00%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.50<br>(10.00%) |
| Other | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |

8. If a parent wishes his/her child to attend a school outside of the school attendance area Check only one of the following responses:

a. The child should not be allowed to attend a school outside of his attendance area *8 (12.5%)*

b. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school but the School Division should not allow him/her to ride the school bus *6 (9.4%)*

c. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school, but should be allowed to ride on the school bus only if there is room *20 (31.3%)*

d. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school and the School Division should provide, or pay for, the transportation to the school selected *18 (28.1%)*

e. Other response (please specify)

9. In respect to the number and distribution of schools serving the people of the Spirit River School Division, please select the one option for each of the three levels which best fits your beliefs.

   a. Elementary Schools. (Gr. 1-6) - Select only one of the following

      1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served *25* *(39.1%)*

      2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities *25* *(39.1%)*

      3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools *9* *(14.1%)*

      4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division *4* *(6.3%)*

      5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

   b. Junior High School (Gr. 7-9), select only one of the following:

      1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served *14* *(21.9%)*

      2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities *25* *(39.1%)*

      3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools *5* *(7.8%)*

      4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division *9* *(14.1%)*

      5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

c. Senior High School (Gr. 10-12). Select only one of the following.

1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served *13* *(26.3%)*

2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities *16* *(25%)*

3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools *4* *(6.3%)*

4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division *20* *(31.5%)*

5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

10. Would you like to have vocational education offered in one or more than one, high school(s) in your School Division?
Yes *(%)* No *(%)*

a. One school *21* *(32.8%)*

b. Two Schools *6* *(9.4%)*

c. Three Schools *18* *(28.1%)*

d. Should residential facilities be provided?
Yes *23* *(35%)* No *26* *(40.6%)*

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

## Survey of Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

*This survey is being conducted by the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta as part of a larger study which is being carried out on behalf of the Spirit River School Division #47.*

Research Team:
E.J. Ingram
K.L. Ward
T.C. Montgomerie

January 1984

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

### Survey of Parents' Opinions About School Attendance Areas

1. Please check the school attendance area (the school you are "supposed" to send your children to) whether or not you have children attending this school?

   a. Blueberry Creek *39*

   b. Bonanza *48*

   c. Eaglesham *79*

   d. Rycroft *79*

   e. Savanna *58*

   f. Spirit River (Elementary or High School) *173*

   g. Wanham *49*

   h. Woking *34*

2. Please identify the grade level of each of your children presently attending school along with the school each attends. If you would prefer any, or all, of your children to attend a different school identify the school(s) you would like each to attend if it were possible and convenient for them to do so.

   *See Page 89*

   a. If you would prefer to send one or more of your children to a school other than the one they are now attending please list the reasons below.

   ________________________________________

   ________________________________________

   ________________________________________

   b. Although you may wish your child (children) to attend another school, what is the maximum travel time (both ways, in minutes) you would accept for your child to attend this school? *Mean= 84.1 min. (n= 150)*

   c. If any of your children are not attending the school they are "supposed" to attend, why did you make the decision to send them to a different school?

   ________________________________________

   ________________________________________

   ________________________________________

## Table 3

## Schools Currently Attended VS Schools Preferred To Be Attended

| Prefer to Attend<br>Currently Attend | Blueberry Creek | Bonanza | Eaglesham | Rycroft | Savanna | Spirit River Elementary | Spirit River High | Wanham | Woking | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blueberry Creek | 49 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Bonanza | 0 | 53 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Eaglesham | 0 | 0 | 127 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Rycroft | 0 | 0 | 0 | 109 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Savanna | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 107 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Spirit River Elementary | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 130 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Spirit River High | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 213 | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| Wanham | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 79 | 0 | 0 |
| Woking | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 35 | 2 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 30 |

d. For each of the children identified in question 2 above, "Child a" to "Child h", indicate how they usually get to and from school and how many minutes the round trip takes (check one mode for each child)

| | School Bus | Other Vehicle | Walk | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blueberry Creek | 27.83<br>(92.78%) | 1.83<br>(6.11%) | 0.33<br>(1.11%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Bonanza | 33.50<br>(95.71%) | 1.50<br>(4.29%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Eaglesham | 47.00<br>(87.04%) | 7.00<br>(12.96%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Rycroft | 28.83<br>(84.80%) | 4.33<br>(12.75%) | 0.83<br>(2.45%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Savanna | 45.00<br>(84.91%) | 8.00<br>(15.09%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Sp. River Elem. | 43.50<br>(90.63%) | 4.50<br>(9.38%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Sp. River High | 82.00<br>(78.85%) | 22.00<br>(21.15%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Wanham | 37.00<br>(92.50%) | 3.00<br>(7.50%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Woking | 17.50<br>(83.33%) | 3.50<br>(16.67%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |
| Other | 15.50<br>(81.58%) | 3.00<br>(15.79%) | 0.50<br>(2.63%) | 0.0<br>(0.0%) |

3. Please check the appropriate response in respect to school bus service

   a. None of my children use the school bus 128

   b. My children catch the school bus at my gate / door 310

   c. My children must go:

      1) less than 1 / 2 mile 200

      2) 1 / 2 mile to 1 mile 12

      3) over 1 mile 11

   to catch the school bus.

4. If any of your children ride the school bus please check the response which best represents your level of satisfaction with each of the following:

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The time my children spend on the school bus | 133<br>(32.2%) | 217<br>(50.9%) | 50<br>(11.7%) | 26<br>(6.1%) |
| The distance my children have to travel on the school bus | 130<br>(31.9%) | 213<br>(52.2%) | 47<br>(11.5%) | 18<br>(4.4%) |
| Routing Arrangements | 121<br>(30.5%) | 196<br>(49.4%) | 54<br>(13.6%) | 26<br>(6.5%) |

5. If a parent wishes his/her child to attend a school outside of the school attendance area (the school they are "supposed" to attend) what would be your response?

   a. The child should not be allowed to attend a school outside of his attendance area *95* *(16.9%)*

   b. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school but the School Division should not allow him/her to ride the school bus *37* *(6.6%)*

   c. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school, but should be allowed to ride on the school bus only if there is room *146* *(26%)*

   d. The child should be allowed to attend an outside school and the School Division should provide, or pay for, the transportation to the school selected *157* *(28%)*

   e. Other response (please specify)

   ______________________________

   ______________________________

   ______________________________

6. In general how satisfied are you with the school(s) your children are attending? Please check one response for each of the children you identified in question (2) above.

| | **Very Satisfied** | **Satisfied** | **Dissatisfied** | **Very Dissatisfied** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blueberry Creek | 21<br>(41.18%) | 28<br>(54.90%) | 1<br>(1.96%) | 1<br>(1.96%) |
| Bonanza | 18<br>(27.69%) | 36<br>(55.38%) | 7<br>(10.77%) | 4<br>(6.15%) |
| Eaglesham | 22<br>(16.42%) | 93<br>(69.40%) | 12<br>(8.96%) | 7<br>(5.22%) |
| Rycroft | 28<br>(24.56%) | 71<br>(62.28%) | 14<br>(12.28%) | 1<br>(0.88%) |
| Savanna | 24<br>(22.02%) | 79<br>(72.48%) | 6<br>(5.50%) | 0<br>(0.0%) |
| Sp. River Elem. | 70<br>(51.09%) | 63<br>(45.99%) | 2<br>(1.46%) | 2<br>(1.46%) |
| Sp. River High | 46<br>(20.35%) | 136<br>(60.18%) | 36<br>(15.93%) | 8<br>(3.54%) |
| Wanham | 24<br>(27.59%) | 51<br>(58.62%) | 12<br>(13.79%) | 0<br>(0.0%) |
| Woking | 8<br>(17.02%) | 26<br>(55.32%) | 12<br>(25.53%) | 1<br>(2.13%) |
| Other | 19<br>(59.38%) | 9<br>(28.13%) | 0<br>(0.0%) | 4<br>(12.50%) |

7. The School Act allows a school board to provide religious instruction for those who desire this option. Would you be in favour of the school board providing this option in your school for those who wish it

   Yes *405* *(72.2%)* No *138* *(24.6%)*

   a. Comments

8. In respect to the number and distribution of schools serving the people of the Spirit River School Division, please select the one option for each of the three levels which best fits your beliefs.

   a. Elementary Schools. (Gr. 1-6) - Select only one of the following

      1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served *204* *(36.4%)*

      2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities *215* *(38.3%)*

      3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools *42* *(7.5%)*

      4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division *30* *(5.3%)*

      5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

   b. Junior High School (Gr. 7-9), select only one of the following:

      1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served *149* *(26.6%)*

      2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities *209* *(37.3%)*

      3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools *50* *(8.9%)*

      4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division *49* *(8.7%)*

      5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

c. Senior High School (Gr. 10-12). Select only one of the following.

1) The present schools should be retained and new ones built to serve communities now not well served *109* *(19.4%)*.

2) The present schools should be retained, but no new ones should be built to serve other communities *169* *(30.1%)*

3) One or two of the present schools could be closed and the pupils transported to other schools *56* *(10%)*

4) Two or three centralized schools could serve the entire school division *101* *(18%)*

5) Comments (reasons for your choice)

9. Would you like to have vocational education offered in one, or more than one, high school(s) in your School Division?

Yes *487* *(86.8%)* No *74* *(13.2%)*

a. One school *197* *(35.1%)*

b. Two Schools *93* *(16.6%)*

c. Three Schools *97* *(17.3%)*

d. Should residential facilities be provided?

Yes *357* *(63.6%)* No *204* *(36.4%)*

10. Best features of the school(s) my children are attending

11. Areas in need of improvement in the school(s) my children are attending

12. GENERAL COMMENTS

Are there other concerns or comments you would like to make about the areas covered by this questionnaire?

## Appendix 4 - Schedule for Interviews with Parents

Attendance Area ____________________

Interviewee(s) ____________________

As a follow-up to our questionnaire we would like to discuss some of the major questions with representative parents, and others, from each attendance area.

a. The numbers, types and quality of Schools serving the Division.

b. Policies on attendance areas.

c. Quality of bus services.

1. Are the numbers and locations of Schools in the Spirit River School Division adequate?

____________________

____________________

____________________

____________________

____________________

2. What changes and improvements could be made in the schools (e.g. grades taught, programs, facilities, services, means of instruction, etc.)?

____________________

____________________

____________________

____________________

____________________

3. Should students be allowed to attend school outside of their own attendance area?

____________________

____________________

____________________

____________________

____________________

4. Who should be responsible for the transportation of pupils out of their own attendance area? (The Board, parents, other combinations).

5. Are there changes you would make in attendance area boundaries?

6. How would you rate the bus service? How could it be improved?

7. (Ask this question only if it is appropriate from the responses given)

Where should the School Division get the funds for the changes or improvements suggested:

a. eliminating other programs? which ones?

b. increasing taxes?

c. increased grants from the province?

8. Are there other areas of concern you would like to discuss with us?

## Appendix 5 - Review of the Literature on Attendance Areas

### Introduction

This paper is a report on the findings of a literature review undertaken as part of the **Spirit River Attendance Area Study**. The review focuses on topics of concern relative to attendance areas, such as:

1. Declining enrolments.
2. Neighborhood / community schools.
3. Quality schooling in small schools.
4. School bussing policies and practices.
5. Centralized vs. decentralized schooling.
6. Open vs. closed attendance areas.
7. Students crossing jurisdictional boundaries.
8. Voucher systems.

For the most part, an abundance of relevant and current material has been found on these topics, as they focus on issues which are of major concern to educators across North America in the decade ahead. There appears to be little information directly related to students crossing jurisdictional boundaries, or open vs. closed attendance areas. However, these topics are occasionally dealt with in sources focusing on other concerns. The primary focus of the search effort was a computer search of the **ERIC** databases,**CIJE** and **RIE**. This proved to be the most productive source of information. The **Canadian Education Index** and **Alberta Education Index** were also reviewed, as well as the card catalogue and **COMCAT** of Coutts library, and the reference materials. The **Ed. Theses** database contained only a few related documents, and these were primarily dated, and of little value. A number of materials from the library of **Alberta Advanced Education** proved useful sources of information, as did a number of materials from other universities obtained through the University of Alberta interlibrary loan service.

### Declining Enrolments

The extent of the decline in school enrolments across North America has been well documented. The Edmonton Journal (1979) reported a "quiet steady erosion" of the rural population of Alberta, with the exception of areas of heavy natural resource development. It noted that during the five year period 1971-72 to 1976, enrolment dropped in all but seven of sixty rural school districts. In total, the sixty rural school districts lost 2,756 students in Grades one to six over that five year period. These drops are now having their impact on secondary schools across the province. The reasons given for the decline were: a lower birth rate, the trend to consolidation of farms into larger units run by fewer people, and the rural to urban drift. Many farms and ranches today are owned and operated by suburban commuters whose children attend city schools. The response in most rural areas has been to adopt a policy of centralization, bussing students to larger centrally located schools, and making boarded up and vacant school buildings a common sight in many rural areas.

Forecasts of Alberta school enrolments issued by Alberta Education (1979), indicate a leveling of this trend in the eighties, and slight increases by 1988. Their central projection anticipates a 1988 level about 19% above 1979 levels.

Henderson (1978) presents comprehensive statistical documentation of enrolment decline in Ontario in a report prepared for the Commission on Declining School Enrolments in that province. During the years 1970 to 1977 (inclusive) 813 Ontario schools were closed, and an additional 75 were annexed. The total classroom capacity of Ontario schools, as of 1977, was 2,594,347 which compares with an actual enrolment of 1,960,647. This indicates a great deal of surplus space exists in Ontario classrooms.

Dean (1981) reports that the public school enrolment in New York City declined some 200,000 students since 1970 to a current level (1981) of just over 900,000.

There is ample further evidence in the literature to indicate the widespread nature of the problem of declining school enrolments.

The most comprehensive document encountered in the literature dealing with decline was Henderson's report (1978). This report contains a wealth of information dealing with the problem of decline in schools, and contains numerous suggestions and strategies for managing decline. Since it was probably the most valuable document encountered in the literature review, it will be discussed at some length.

Chapter One provides extensive statistical documentation of decline in Ontario. Space statistics (enrolment figures, projections, surplus space) and site statistics (closings, sale of buildings, subsequent uses) are provided for all school districts in the province. Chapter Two presents eight selected case studies of the decline process in Ontario school districts. Also included in this chapter is a compendium of policies and procedures instituted in eight selected jurisdictions. From these case studies, Henderson compiled a comprehensive list of accepted practices for confronting declining enrolment within a school. This list is representative of similar compilations encountered elsewhere in the literature, and is outlined below:

1. Adjust attendance area boundaries.
2. Supplement/upgrade programs in schools which do not meet desired standards.
3. Relocate programs (e.g. special education, ESL, French immersion).
4. Alter existing school organizational structures; reorganize grade level breakdown.
5. Establish split classes.
6. Twin or pair schools.
7. Establish special purpose open enrolment schools.
8. Use vacant classroom space for other needs of the public/separate education system -- e.g. special education programs, adult education, decentralization of administrative offices, storage, etc.
9. Share accomodation with another board; develop community use of the facility; or lease vacant space in order to obtain revenue and/or share maintenance costs, where compatibility with the continuing operation of the school unit permits. The following order of priority is observed:
    a. Use for accomodation of students of the separate school board or other non-profit schools.
    b. Use for needs of the publicly supported post-secondary system.
    c. Use for the needs of the community. (e.g. community centres, libraries, day care centres, etc.)
    d. Use for the needs of other government agencies.
    e. Use for the needs of the private sector.
10. Lock one or more classrooms.
11. Repatriate grades 7 and 8 to their own schools.
12. Close the school and transfer students and staff, or phase closing, one grade at a time. (Transportation is an important consideration here.) Attempt to use the building in a method outlined in (8) and (9) above. If the board cannot lease the building, it may be offered for sale, to the following, in order:
    a. Another school board.
    b. A publicly supported post-secondary institution.

   c. The municipality in which the land is located or to the local board thereof.
   d. A Ministry of the Government of Ontario, or an authority established by it.
   e. A non-profit organization funded in whole or in part on a continuing basis by the Provincial Government or the Government of Canada.
   f. The general public - through the process of public tender, if no offer to purchase at a price acceptable to the school board is received within ninety days.

13. Mothball the building only if it is impossible to sell or lease it.

Henderson elaborates on these alternative strategies and discusses their implications in pages 148 to 159. Further discussion of these alternate strategies will be made in subsequent portions of this report.

In Chapter Three, Henderson deals extensively with the issue of Community Use of School Space. This section will be addressed at greater length in a later chapter of this report.

The final chapter of Henderson's report presents a set of guidelines for school boards faced with the problem of declining enrolment. Again, this set of guidelines is representative of similar recommendations found elsewhere in the literature, and is outlined below:

1. There must be a long range master plan; it should cover ten years, and be based on the particular situation of each board.
2. Adequate planning and research in the early stages is most important.
3. Work in cooperation with neighboring boards; hold discussions and workshops.
4. Develop policies that deal specifically with surplus facilities: consolidation or accomodation, closing procedures, transportation, alternative uses (leasing of surplus space) with compatibility being the prime consideration. Any workable and useful policy should include the following criteria:
   a. Minimum effective class size.
   b. Advisory committee specifications.
   c. An appeal mechanism.
5. Annual reviews of each school in the district are imperative. At least 18 months, and preferably two or even three years should be allowed before a final decision is reached by a board on the future of a school. Invite community participation from the beginning. School boards must be able to consolidate while maintaining public support and understanding. Three conditions must be met:

- a. Preserving school credibility.
- b. Controlling community conflict.
- c. Developing consensus.

6. Any policy on leasing school space should cover these items:
   - a. Time period.
   - b. Fee structure.
   - c. Cancellation clause.
   - d. Type of tenant.
   - e. Other(any special conditions).
7. Identify an acceptable alternative use for a surplus school before the decision to close it is finalized.
8. If closure is the only available alternative, principals, teachers, students, parents, and the community must be informed about the proposed changes immediately. There must be a definite policy on school closure, incorporating three clauses: (1) advisory committee membership and purposes, (2) criteria for closure, and (3) process for closure.
9. One especially important consideration is the ability of the administration to implement quickly the decisions of the board.
10. Ministry of Education guidelines must be followed when disposing of school property.
11. Mothballing of a building should be considered only as a last resort because of (1) continuing operating/maintenance costs, (2) the threat of vandalism, and (3) public resentment of vacant schools.
12. Before closing a school, consider removing or selling portables, close junior high schools, repatriate grades 7 and 8 to their local schools.
13. Establish priorities in phasing out schools. Be prepared to justify the decision to close a school relative to neighboring schools which are not being closed.
14. The decision to close must be carefully deliberated. Short term savings might turn into long term headaches. For instance, rising transporation costs may require rethinking of centralization policies in the future.
15. Boards should look at the situation in their secondary schools as soon as possible. (The focus of concern shifts from vacant space in the elementary schools to subject option possibilities at the secondary level.)

16. In cases where rapid growth requires the construction of new schools (ie. new subdivisions) boards should consider seriously funding arrangements whereby the building is partly financed by the board, partly by the municipality. (Parks and Recreation)
17. Alternative uses:
    a. A parallel use policy is recommended in which terms such as "surplus space" are clearly defined.
    b. Use buildings evenings, weekends, and during the summer.
    c. Use surplus teachers for as many non-school programs as possible.
    d. Vacant school space used for alternate programs must be easily accessible and close to public transit in cities.
    e. Compatibility of use must be a major consideration.
    f. More emphasis must be placed on career skills and leisure activities for teenagers, adults, and senior citizens.
    g. For profit businesses and agencies should be encouraged to lease underused secondary school buildings. They could be approached with a view to participating in work-study programs; boards could also benefit financially.
    h. Suggested uses of vacant school space:
        1) nursery school and daycare; before and after school care for school age children.
        2) post-secondary education: community college, university, and extension courses.
        3) special vocational programs for early school leavers, work-study programs.
        4) improved remedial work.
        5) facilities and programs for special students.
        6) upgrading/retraining programs.
        7) career counselling and guidance.
        8) adult basic education.
        9) in-service teacher training/retraining.
        10) senior citizens' programs.
        11) community and social activities: legal aid, dropout counselling, or other programs.
        12) community library for adults and pre-schoolers.
        13) health services/clinics.

14) outdoor education, teen activities.

15) sports and recreation, arts and crafts.

16) fund-raising events and volunteer services.

i. Suggested uses of vacant school buildings:

1) community centre.

2) youth recreation centre.

3) alternate form of school, university or community college annex.

4) special vocational annex.

5) centre for the mentally or trainable retarded.

6) conversion to housing.

7) conversion to museum or art gallery.

8) conversion to shopping centre.

9) education centre (board office, administration, etc.).

A report prepared for Alberta Education (Communitas Inc. and Larrie Taylor Architect Ltd. 1982) identifies an extensive list of alternate uses of excess school space. Since this listing is very similar to that of Henderson, it will not be repeated here. This report also includes recommendations to school districts, municipalities, and to Alberta Education regarding the use of excess school space. These shall be outlined briefly.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS

1. School districts with excess space or potential excess space are advised to develop a comprehensive strategy for the management of educational space and facilities.
2. School districts should adopt a decentralized approach to management, involving in a real and substantial way, all those affected by decisions about the use of school space.
3. School districts should use the School Needs Formula or some modification of such, for the determination of potential effectiveness of excess space, recognizing that using a formula other than the Provincial Formula may impose certain costs.
4. School districts should take into account the potential financial implications of underutilization of existing school facilities.
5. The district should consider ways of using its excess space more efficiently.
6. The first step in a district's development of a strategy for the management of educational

space and facilities should be the development and adoption of goals and objectives to guide that strategy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO MUNICIPALITIES

1. Municipalities should adopt land use by-laws which include school lands or buildings, and take into account the character, form, and integrity of the neighborhood, and which meet the criteria of a school's plan for supplementary uses.
2. Municipalities should actively support school districts which pursue effective supplementary use programs, and further, that municipalities, where appropriate, enter into agreements with such school districts for provision of community facilities.
3. Municipalities should offer to participate in the planning process adopted by a School Board to develop a strategy to manage excess space and that municipalities develop procedures to inform School Boards of any anticipated changes to plans and land use controls.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO ALBERTA EDUCATION

1. Alberta Education should establish an information dissemination program with regards to planning and possibilities for the use of excess school space.
2. Alberta Education should become the clearing house for information about the experience of other jurisdictions in managing excess school space. Information gathered could include both general experiences and specific material, such as districts' goals and objectives for the use of space, leasing policies, marketing techniques, administrative procedures and documentation, nature and cost of modifications for different types of clients, etc. This information could be available on a request basis or through a periodic information publication.
3. Alberta Education should establish a one year start-up program to enable a school district to plan for the use of excess space.
4. Alberta Education should establish a technical support service for local school districts. This service should be provided free of charge in year one of a district's program. In subsequent years, this service should be charged on a use basis.

5. The "Building Quality Restoration Program: (1979-1983) should be extended to include the cost of modifications necessary to accomodate community based users who are unable to raise the capital necessary to cover the cost of such modifications.
6. Alberta Education should undertake a study of the problems and costs of reconversion prior to 1985, to determine whether there is a need for a special program to assist with the reconversion of school facilities.
7. The School Act should be revised so that a school district may lease or rent any real property or buildings or portions thereof for use by a user who: is acceptable to the school district; is acceptable to the municipality (able to obtain the necessary permits), and is acceptable to the adjacent community.
8. School districts leasing/renting excess school space should establish a special account for income and expenses with regard to leased/rented space, and that the School Buildings Board only exercise its discretionary powers with regard to a reduction of financial support for a school buildings project, when and if it establishes that a district has unduly profited by the situation.
9. The School Buildings Board, in consultation with existing school districts, should establish acceptable income/expense ratios to be used as the basis for determining undue profit.
10. Alberta Education should consider establishing special class size standards for special programs such as ECS, TMH, EMH, etc., that take into account the particular nature and requirements of these programs.

This report also outlines in considerable detail the steps involved in the planning process for use of excess space, and concludes with a number of suggestions for implementing such a plan.

Another valuable source of information on the problem of declining enrolment is a report by Bussard (1981a). This report has a narrower focus in that it deals specifically with declining enrolment in the single high school district.

Bussard discusses a number of problems specific to the single high school district, as well as discussing a number of the strategies mentioned by Henderson. Most importantly, the single high school district does not have the option of closing or consolidating schools, unless it consolidates with another school district. This may not be desirable, as in most cases, consolidation has already been carried to its realistic limits. Particularly in rural areas, transportation distances will create limitations on the extent of consolidation.

Bussard also mentions some differences between elementary and secondary schools that determine how decline can be dealt with. The primary difference is that high schools offer more varied programs. Thus staff are specialists, and shifting faculty around or replacing staff members is more difficult when cutbacks occur. Declining enrolment may be unevenly distributed over courses and programs, making it difficult to maintain a full course offering.

The bulk of Bussard's report is a compilation of recommendations for dealing with the problem of decline similar to that of Henderson. There are, however, a number of notable points not previously mentioned.

Initially, decline may be an opportunity to allow normality to return, if a preceding growth period has resulted in overcrowded facilities. Space may become available for programs for which there was previously no room. In most cases though, relief will only be temporary. Bussard discusses a number of strategies aimed at solutions within the existing school structure:

1. Within a school, one can make greater use of tutorials and independent study,combine related courses in the same room, make greater use of educational technology, combine related courses, or levels of the same course in one class, open electives to several grade levels, reduce the number of electives offered, retrain or recruit staff competent to teach several areas, change the schedule of the school day, week, or year to make better use of staff time and resources.
2. At the district level one may consider moving the ninth grade into the high school to maintain enrolment levels, and utilize existing facilities to their maximum capacity.
3. If geographically feasible, strategies in cooperation with other districts can be considered. Specialty teachers can be shared and rotated among schools. Sports teams, bands, clubs, and extracurricular programs can be jointly sponsored. Vocational courses requiring special facilities, or low enrolment courses can be split up among adjoining schools. Thus with scheduling adjustments, students can travel to other schools for these courses.
4. Programs, services, and staff may be shared through a regional consortium, or educational service agency (ie. Regional Offices). Special facilities and equipment can be rotated among schools, cooperatives for developing and distributing materials can be formed.
5. Consolidation may be considered, if geographically feasible, and if the move has the support of the communities involved. Consolidation may consist of merging two entire districts, or at

the high school level only.

6. Strategies using educational and community institutions outside the school system can be considered. The school may widen its program to reach a wider clientele.
7. Work cooperatively with other community agencies, businesses, and individuals. Bring community resources into the schools and send students out into the community on work-study projects.

Bussard's report lists numerous examples of successful implementations of each of these strategies. Considerable emphasis is placed on expanding the school's role as a community institution.

As does Henderson, Bussard emphasizes the need for a comprehensive planning process when dealing with declining enrolment. This process may take several years, and should include the following stages: defining problems and goals, setting priorities, exploring and evaluating options, and developing and implementing a plan of action. Implementation should be followed by continuous feedback and evaluation, as ongoing changes may require policy revisions.

Burstall (1980) provides a brief summary of the CODE report, with emphasis and commentary on its findings she feels to be noteworthy. Particularly, it was noted that:

> the decision to close a school had sometimes been taken too hastily, and later regretted because, for a variety of reasons, the anticipated savings had not been forthcoming. For instance, the receiving school might need modifying or renovating at a higher cost than had been anticipated, the need to transport children longer distances by bus could prove more costly than originally estimated, and where left empty, the cost of protecting a school building from vandalism and of maintaining it in a reasonable state of repair could absorb much of the projected savings. **Even where the anticipated economies had been realized, it was recognized that economic factors had to be balanced against the cost of closing a school in human terms.**

Burstall also emphasizes the effects of decline on the teaching force. A shrinking school system will be served by an increasingly aged and static teaching force. Employment prospects for newly qualified teachers are exceedingly bleak, and morale of teachers is low. A shift in emphasis will occur in the field of teacher training: retraining existing teachers will become the focus, rather than training new ones. The demand for specialists at the secondary level will decline. As well, a number of suggestions aimed at eliminating the teacher surplus are mentioned, such as job sharing, incentives for early retirement, an increase in part-time and temporary employment, and improved opportunities for teacher exchanges, secondment, and leaves of absences.

In closing, Burstall notes that the problem of declining enrolment is compounded by rising costs and a shortage of resources. Educational funding based on a per pupil base means less money for educational programs while unit costs are going up, and static costs such as building repair and maintenance do not decline when student rolls drop.

Bishop (1979) discusses strategies for dealing with decline, options and alternatives to consider before closing schools, the implications of declining enrolment on staff reductions, and strategies for dealing with decline. His treatment of these topics is similar to those already presented in this review. As well, he identifies five general decision-making techniques for dealing with enrolment decline:

1. Unilateral board decision (closed system approach).
2. Chief school administrator's decision.
3. Role of a consultant or consultant teams.
4. Role of an advisory committee (citizen and/or professional staff).
5. A community task force (open system approach).

Bishop also presents a summary of what he sees as the social/political issues frequently raised in relation to the problem of decline:

1. School closing should be dealt with as a multiple agency problem, not the school's alone.
2. If plans are adopted for new and socially desirable uses of vacant buildings, the increased costs should not become an additional burden on the basic school budget, thus diluting services to children in compulsory attendance ages.
3. When schools are closed and attendance patterns rearranged, this should be seen as a constructive opportunity for socially and educationally beneficial child placement.
4. Although schools may be closing now, there may emerge at some future time a need for additional school space. There is always the possibility that the decline trend could reverse.
5. The use of buildings for socially constructive purposes may cause little resistance in some communities and major opposition in others. It is vital to consider community needs and neighborhood character before deciding what use to make of a vacant school.

Thomas (1980) feels that the problems associated with school closure are more human than educational. He sees the major issues associated with school closure as job security, student welfare, and quality of education. Leadership qualities, such as abiity to listen, synthesize, be decisive, and remain positive despite conflict and confrontation are vital to the successful administration of the closing process. Finally, and most importantly, in Thomas's view, questions of justice, fairness, and equity are more important than bread and butter items such as cost, transportation, buildings, demographics, textbooks, and staffing patterns. In a separate article (1978), he presents a detailed guide of steps to follow in administering districts with declining enrolments.

Dean (1981) outlines the response of the New York City school system to the problem of decline. A number of the strategies previously discussed are mentioned in this article. Of additional interest are some of the reasons he cites as motivating resistance to school closings:

1. The dislocation of thousands of children.
2. Surrendured buidings were being vandalized, resulting in neighborhood deterioration.
3. Inability to recycle buildings.
4. Limited sale and constructive reuse of buildings due to general economic austerity.
5. Adverse social, recreational, and economic effects on the community.

Noteworthy also is his description of the Board of Education's failure to effectively recycle closed schools.

Levine (1979), an organizational theorist, outlines some principals of organizational cutback management and planning which have implications for school systems:

1. Change is most easily accomplished when people have something to gain, but austerity makes this unlikely.
2. Organizational contraction creates serious morale problems making it difficult to improve productivity to make up for cuts.
3. When cuts are made across the board, efficient organizations are more likely to be penalized than poorly performing ones.
4. In the initial stages of contraction, few members of the organization believe the cuts are for real, or are permanent.

Looking to the future, Bussard (1981) feels that the recent trend of declining enrolment and its subsequent problems with finding new uses for vacated school buildings holds a valuable lesson for educational planners; that is, since an increasingly uncertain future makes long term forecasts about the necessity of building difficult, any new building required should have designed in flexibility so as to maximize their adaptability to alternate uses at a later date. Possible future uses should also be a factor in selecting a location for any new building.

Before leaving the topic of declining enrolment, there are a number of articles related directly to **school closing** that deserve mention. Pauline and Pitruzello (1982) outline some key considerations to bear in mind when closing schools. Consistent with opinions expressed elsewhere in the literature, they emphasize the importance of consulting the public at every step of the process. Further, the community should have a real voice in decisions, and not simply be paid lip service. They recommend hiring outside consultants, as they will readily be recognized as an impartial source of expertise. Interestingly, they also note that outside consultants can make good "lightning rods" for the criticisms of disgruntled citizens.

> . . . they very likely will take some of the political heat that otherwise might leave board members and administrators charred (p21).

Surmacz (1982) presents a set of guidelines for planning and carrying out the school closing process. Basically, Surmacz's recommendations are quite similar to others previously mentioned in this report.

Wholeben (1980) stresses that the primary responsibilities of any school board, particularly in a period of decline, are provision of quality education and sound financial management and control. Decline has multiple effects on district schools and the community and brings to the forefront the conflicting goals of maximizing program capability and minimizing operational inefficiency.

### Neighborhood/Community Schools

Earlier in this report, a variety of alternate uses of vacant school facilities was presented. The majority of these would fall into the category of community use of schools. It would appear that the problem of declining enrolment has indirectly given impetus to the community school movement, by making available in the schools space for community use-programs. Similarly, a backlash against centralization as a response to declining enrolments has lent support to the concept of the neighborhood school.

Henderson (1978) discusses the community school concept at some length in his report. He outlines some of the problems associated with community school use as: increased noise, traffic, mess, volume of calls to the office, groups needing wheelchair access, groups that are difficult to place, and the question of fee for service.

However, he sees the advantages as far outweighing the disadvantages. Community use programs inevitably increase parental involvement; children are exposed to different age groups and to children with handicaps; community use programs place services right in the school; they are good for public relations; alternative uses are seen as helping to keep the school open; they better serve the community, and in some cases can increase the financial viability of the school.

Henderson describes the Toronto Board of Education's **Parallel Use Policy**, which was developed to preserve the city's network of neighborhood schools, provide community organizations with low cost accessible space, and provide for use of excess space in a way that would be beneficial to the school, the community, and the board.

Sloan and Nolin (1980) discuss a number of survival strategies applicable to small rural schools, such as cooperation, twinning or pairing of schools, use of Regional Education Service Agencies and gives several examples of various forms of interschool cooperation utilized in four small rural Minnesota school districts.

Barone (1980) mentions some of the advantages and disadvantages of inherent in small schools. Among the most important advantages were:

1. Ease of communication.
2. Credibility: educators are better known.
3. Stronger feeling of belonging among students and staff.
4. Shared values: less time spent resolving differences, commitment to common goals is easier.
5. Small schools provide greater opportunity for self importance in school-aged persons; the alienation so common in large schools is absent.
6. Better relations between staff and administration.

Barone also recognizes a number of disadvantages which can arise in the small school setting:

1. Overfamiliarity: educators constantly in the public eye.
2. Too much meddling by parents (required are strong, secure unthreatened leaders who will listen to all yet make their own decisions).
3. Tendency for majority to effect a tyranny over minority viewpoints.

Barone recognizes that many of the stated advantages and disadvantages of small schools are really opposite sides of the same coin. What is needed for effective leadership in the small school setting is the right balance between aloofness and over-familiarity.

Gilbert (1982) addresses a number of issues previously discussed, such as which buildings to close, how best to dispose of school properties, and problems facing subsequent users of school property. She suggests school boards should have an underlying policy for school operation of maintaining close school community cooperation, yet having user groups pay their fair share. Active pursuit of a strong community school policy would reduce the problem of school administrators having to dispose of surplus facilities.

Edeburn and Luchsinger (1978) point out that one of the primary weaknesses of the small school is the inability to offar a varied curriculum. As a countermeasure, he suggests that the use of "mini-courses" be encouraged in small schools so that students could be exposed to a wider variety of course offerings than would otherwise be possible. Courses of varying lengths, learning packets, and other individualized approaches are discussed as means of increasing the small school student's opportunity for choice.

Some of the stronger arguments in favor of small local schools are summarized nicely in a statement by Henderson:

> It is a fact that the small local school represents the centre for community vitality, pride, and neighborhood identification. A decision to close can have long term effects on the cohesive fabric of a neighborhood. Angry parents may well ask: "Why should my child be transferred one mile if there is a school one block away?" Community residents wonder if the area will become industrialized after the school closes, and to what extent the neighborhood will be disrupted. The question of property values arises; it is commonly argued that the proximity of a school increases property value while the abscence of that same school will diminish it . . . Once an elementary school is closed, the environmental forces of emigration, population decline and neighborhood deterioration are set in motion. It is difficult -- if not impossible -- to reverse these.

Lazaruk (1982) conducted a comparative analysis of community schools in Alberta for Alberta Education. The study compares Designated Community Schools (DCSs) and Non-Designated Community Schools (NDSs) on ten items. The findings (p48-52) are as follows:

1. DCSs used human resources more frequently to enhance the school curriculum. In addition,

DCS students went into the community more frequently to use available facilities and resources. Further, DCS students went into the community more frequently to provide community service while they learned. They also placed more emphasis on the study of the local community.

2. Parent and community members were more extensively involved in DCSs in providing advice on the school curricula. DCSs involved community leaders other than parents to a greater extent in helping teachers through voluntary service. However, difference between the extent to which parents were involved helping teachers through voluntary service was not significant.
3. Parent and community involvement in providing advice on school curriculum was greater in DCSs. DCSs and NDSs did not appear to differ in the extent to which school boards encouraged teacher participation in school district decision making.
4. DCSs offered more educational, recreational and cultural activities involving people of all ages.
5. DCSs used community adults and students as resource personnel to a greater extent.
6. DCSs cooperated with community agencies to a greater extent in the provision of comprehensive educational, recreational, cultural, and social services in the school attendance area. DCSs were also more extensively involved in community improvement projects.
7. DCSs and NDSs did not differ significantly in design, but did differ in adaptation of school facilities for community use. DCSs reported more modifications or adaptations of school facilities to enhance community use through such features as multi-use areas, kitchens, community rooms, and community libraries.
8. DCS facilities were used more by community groups. DCSs were made available more often on an extended time basis daily and yearly.
9. DCSs appeared to study local problems and issues more frequently than NDSs.
10. DCSs assigned more importance to community related activities than NDSs. DCSs organized activities to foster cooperative relations with the community more frequently and had estblished more effective communication with the community.

Lazaruk draws a number of conclusions from the analysis of the data obtained in this study:

1. Designated Community Schools in this study demonstrated a more conscious orientation to

the community than Non-Designated Schools.

2. The ten characteristics of a community school as defined in Alberta appeared to be developed in DCSs to a greater degree than in NDSs.
3. The provision of additional leadership positions and financial support for DCSs may have accounted for the more substantive development of community-related dimensions included in the definition of a community school.
4. Broad-based participation in school related decision making requires clarification. It would appear to be appropriate to delineate more clearly which decisions could be made at the school level and the relationship of these decisions to school district and provincial decisions.
5. Parental and community involvement seemed to be more extensive in DCSs which are elementary schools. DCSs with larger enrolments (usually secondary schools) involved parents and community members to a lesser extent.
6. DCSs which began operation more recently seemed to be more enthusiastic about community involvement and community related activities. (High interest often accompanies an innovation, as noted in the literature on educational change.) It is important to find ways to maintain this interest over the years.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, Lazaruk presents the following recommendations:

1. The definition of a community school and its role should be more widely communicated to the interested lay and professional publics in Alberta. Visitations to the operating community schools, public forums, workshops and articles in local newspapers are a few of the communication means to consider.
2. Relevant training programs would be established in Alberta for leadership positions in community schools and in community education.
3. A clearer definition of community related curriculum should be developed in Alberta.
4. The development of volunteerism should be given more attention in DCSs.
5. The role and nature of school-based decision making should be more clearly defined.
6. A summative evaluation of the Alberta Community School Program Position (ACSPP) should be conducted in approximately five years. Such an evaluation would assist the program in determining its overall effectiveness.

Lazaruk suggests the following questions relating to community schools for further study:

1. Does a community-based or life-centered approach to curriculum make learning more meaningful for children?
2. What is the impact of parents and community member involvement on local decision making and local governance?
3. What is the impact of various leadership approaches in Designated Community Schools?
4. What are the effects of extensive use of community resource personnel and volunteers on teacher effectiveness and attitude?
5. How cost-effective are community schools as compared to non-community schools?
6. Is there a relationship between the level of citizen involvement and knowledge about schools and the degree of support for schools?

**Quality Schooling In Small Schools**

This subject area has considerable overlap with topics discussed elsewhere in this report. One study directed specifically towards this topic deserves mention, however. Veselka (1980) addresses in considerable depth the problems facing small schools and the unique opportunities which are presented in the small school setting. He notes that for some time, small schools have had to devote much energy merely to survive, and to resist strong external pressures for centralization. Small schools, he continues, have to seek solutions to educational problems with a view to their unique circumstances, as solutions designed for large urban systems cannot be assumed to work equally well in the small rural setting.

It is suggested that the curriculum in small rural schools should have strong emphasis on the following features:

1. Strong emphasis on teaching the basic skills and essential facts.
2. An emphasis on practical skills and learning by doing.
3. Training in self-directed study and the development of initiative.
4. A focus on the local rural community.
5. a commitment to familiarizing students with the outside world.
6. An emphasis on the options available to rural youth both within and beyond the local community.

Veselka goes on to discuss the major problems facing small rural schools: inability to provide a diversified course offering, lower student achievement than metropolitan counterparts, teachers inadequately prepared to deal with the unique problems of rural schools, difficulty in providing vocational programs and programs for the disadvantaged or gifted, and lower levels of aspiration in rural students.

Having acknowledged these shortcomings, Veselka presents a number of strategies designed to improve delivery in the small rural system. Intermediate units such as Regional Educational Service Agencies can be a means of organizing cooperative efforts among small rural schools, and of providing a host of specialized services, such as vocational programs, health and nutritional programs, transportation services, and psychological services. Such centers are a logical alternative to further consolidation.

Improving the quality of teaching in rural schools is mentioned as an important factor in improving the quality of schooling in small rural schools. Not enough emphasis is placed on preparing teachers for work in the rural setting during their training. Particularly, student teachers intending to teach in the rural setting should also do their student teaching there.

Needed as well is an effort to design curriculum materials appropriate to the rural communities in which they will be used. Such curricula would reflect and enhance the natural advantages of the rural community, give rural children a realistic sense of options available for their adult lives, incorporate firm but fair performance standards into the overall rural curricula. To enhance these ends, it would be advantageous to create a network of individuals, agencies and organizations committed to the development of rural curricula.

Baskerville (1981) suggests political organization as a means of promoting the viability of small rural schools, and resisting the so-called inevitability of losing one's rural school. He describes the activities of People United For Rural Education (PURE), in promoting the survival and improvement of small rural schools in Iowa. He emphasizes that a great deal of dedication, perseverance, commitment of time and energy are necessary for effective resistance of long established trends such as school consolidation.

### School Bussing Policies and Practices

The transportation of pupils safely to and from schools is a concern of any school board, and particularly so in rural districts. The most comprehensive source of information found in this area was the report on Planning and Analysis Needs for Pupil Transportation by Stanley Associates (1979). This report contains the results and evaluation of a survey conducted on transportation policies and practices in Alberta school jurisdictions. From the survey evaluation, the planning and analysis needs for pupil transportation are identified. From this was developed a step by step pupil transportation management package which is outlined in section three. A work program for the development of these techniques is discussed in section four. Appended to the report are results of the ASTA conference questionaire, a copy of the survey form, route design concepts and techniques, and a discussion of several computer assisted approaches to school bus route planning. The following is a summary of the principal findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study:

1. A majority (about 75%) of the respondents were largely rural school boards with low population densities. These boards expressed several consistent concerns and appear to be having problems meeting the current guidelines for the Alberta Education Grant Assistance Program. Some of these difficulties can be remedied by improved planning and design.
2. Based on the evaluations summarized in the report the following policy, planning and operating needs were identified:
    a. To establish policy guidelines for the provision of pupil transportation services and to establish well defined roles, duties, and reponsibilities for the administration of pupil transportation.
    b. To include a more detailed transportation impact evaluation when the location of a new school is being finalized.
    c. To establish criteria to be used by all school boards for planning, monitoring, and evaluating pupil transportation service.
    d. To establish a consistent systematic approach for planning school bus routes.
    e. To develop the methodology for quickly and accurately evaluating the impacts of alternative routing concepts on transportation costs, the level of service provided, etc.
    f. To provide school boards with data which will assist them in the proper planning of pupil transportation budgets for periods of up to five years.
    g. To provide periodic seminars where information concerning pupil transportation matters can be discussed.
    h. To ensure that all drivers, whether board based or contractor hired, participate in appropriate training programs.
    i. To ensure that school boards accept the principle that marginal changes to school operations should be made where the trade-off involves substantial improvements to

the efficiency of the pupil transportation services.

   j. To establish procedures and criteria for the monitoring and evaluation of existing pupil transportation services.

3. Resolution of the above needs would in most instances be accomplished by dissemination of transportation information to all school boards in the province and by rigorous application of existing and suggested pupil transportation management techniques.
4. Considering the current state-of-the art of route planning and design in the province, improvements and refinements to the manual procedures currently used in route planning and design, would appear to offer more immediate benefits than the development of a computerized bus routing model.
5. Two areas were identified where immediate development work is required to assist in the improvement of manual procedures used in pupil transportation system planning and operation. These include: the development of a data storage and retrieval system, and the development of a pupil forecasting model.
6. Improved route design and operation procedures would be beneficial to most if not all of the jurisdictions surveyed.
7. Although not specifically outlined in the report, it is suggested that a Pupil Transportation Manual be prepared as a means of disseminating information to school boards. This manual would contain planning and route design techniques as well as other relevant information such as: copies of the Highway Traffic Act, typical board policies, sample forms to be used for conducting surveys, system evaluation criteria, etc.

Another valuable reference material in this area is the Bardock and Mathews (1973) handbook Pupil Transportation prepared for Alberta Education. It discusses various aspects of pupil transportation management under three main headings: Administration, Planning and Operations, and Finance. The report concludes with a compilation of seventy four recommendations regarding pupil transporation policy. The findings and recommendations of the study by Stanley Associates is, however more current.

The Ministry of Education in the province of Ontario (1973) prepared a manual of suggestions and quidelines designed to assist school officials in the management of transportation systems. This is along the lines of the final recommendation of the study by Stanley Associates for Alberta. The handbook deals with a number of aspects of school transportation management:

1. It outlines the basic job to be done and responsibilities and reporting relationships for Board staff in managing a school bus operation, whether contracted or Board-owned.
2. It discusses the types of service and safety policies a Board needs to have and presents a sample policy for guidance (2.17).
3. It presents administrative systems for collecting and maintaining files on locations of students to be bused, other information needed for route design and for monitoring the service and safety of the routes.
4. It discusses who should be reponsible and how often routes should be redesigned, and presents basic methods and techniques for designing routes and for longer term planning.
5. It outlines approaches for negotiating and tendering with private operators and discusses contract terms.
6. It discusses how to evaluate contracted vs. Board-owned systems and presents the basic approaches which need to be taken in running a bus operation.
7. Finally, it outlines the rationale behind the Ministry of Education's transportation grant structure.

The manual is an excellent source of information for assisting in the transportation planning for school systems.

Tracz (1970) and Tracz and Norman (1970) outline computerized approaches to design of school bus routes. Tracz feels that use of such systems, while having higher initial costs, would provide substantial financial benefits in the long run. Computerized programs would reduce the manual work involved, while producing routes at least as good as those produced by experienced experts in the field. Computerized bus routing programs would allow the consideration of a greater number of alternatives than is possible using manual techniques. The initial gathering and organizing of facts could easily be computerized for any bus scheduling system, and keeping such a database current would also be simplified.

In some other articles on this topic, Jungherr (1979) describes the implementation of a computerized bus system in the San Francisco Unified School District which resulted in a savings of $250,000 in its first year of operation. Robbins and Turner (1978) describe the implementation of the CAWLIP bus routing program which resulted in reduction of the number of busses required and in route mileages. Lehman and Haskin (1979) discuss the relative merits of district owned vs. contracted bus services. They conclude that, from the cost and safety aspects, contracting is the more attractive alternative, although the advantages are not strikingly significant. Control is the only area where ownership has definite advantages, and these are primarily in the area of day to day operations. Contracting requires no large capital investment and avoids the responsibility of a large and complex system. If a greater degree of control is desirable, this could be specified in the contract. In conclusion, they note that there appears to be a relationship between the size of a school system, and the ability to economically contract.

Finally, a study examining the achievement of bus transported pupils conducted by Thibeault, Zetler, and Wilson (1979) provided conclusive evidence to show that school bus riding time up to ninety minutes does not significantly affect the achievement of transported pupils as measured by earned marks and standardized tests.

### Centralized vs. Decentralized Schools

Homer Elseroad and Jonathan Sher are two prominent names that emerge in any discussion of this issue.

Elseroad (1977) provides an excellent historical background of the consolidation movement, and lists four major factors as providing impetus for the movement:

1. Desire for improvement in the quality of education.
2. Desire to extend the scope of educational opportunity (greater diversity).
3. Desire for a more equitable distribution of the costs and benefits of education.
4. Desire on the part of taxpayer to see their tax dollars utilized more efficiently.

As Elseroad notes, James Conant was one of the primary supporters of the centralization push of the fifties and sixties. Elseroad himself is a strong believer in centralization, as is illustrated by some of his statements:

> Almost all researchers and scholars agree that, wherever it is practical in terms of distance and bus travel time, those 10,000 districts (with enrolments below 1200 students) should be combined or reorganized so as to achieve enrolments of at least 1200 pupils (p25).
>
> . . . it is inevitable that the school district reorganization effort will continue to move forward.

Sher, on the other hand, might be considered one of the leaders of the backlash against centralization. He questions the traditional belief that "bigger is better", and asserts that good and bad schools come in all sizes.

Sher and Tompkins (1977) assert that the research supporting consolidation is unsound, and fails to back up the claims of the the proponents of consolidation. They point out that discussions of the economic benefits of consolidation usually fail to account for the offsetting diseconomies of consolidation, such as increased transportation costs, and improvements to facilities.

Benson (1978) presents an arbitrary assessment of the centralization vs. decentralization issue. On the plus side of centralization, it helps eliminate regional disparities, ensures minimum standards are maintained in all areas, provides sufficient size to exploit economies of scale, tends to reduce the repression of minorities, and enables better coordination and direction of the education system.

On the minus side, decisions in a centralized system are usually made too slowly, and fail to utilize knowledge of local conditions; centralization tends to reduce the opportunity for local initiatives and innovations; larger systems make it more difficult to judge the quality of educational resources, and finally, decentralization fosters competition among districts to put up programs as good or better as those found in neighboring systems.

Benson feels that neither strategy by itself is appropriate, but rather, a balance must be struck between the two.

Lam (1982) also questions the traditional assumptions regarding centralization, and points out several of the desirable characteristics of smaller schools. Of primary importance is the considerable impact that the school has on life in small towns. School closure in these towns may mean detoriation of a lifestyle in which schools provide the focus for many community activities.

The importance of the retaining the school in small communities is well illustrated in an intensive case study of school consolidation and community conflict by Peshkin (1982). The study follows the consolidation pressures and the strong resistance offered by one particular community in a rural school district in Illinois. The school is frequently the hub of social activities in small communities, as well as serving a number of symbolic functions such as community autonomy, vitality, and personal and community tradition and identity. Interestingly, he notes that resistance and difficulty with consolidation is usually encountered more from the parents than from the students. Children soon adjust to new classmates, new physical settings, new routines, procedures, and expectations. It is much more difficult for a community to adjust to the loss of its school. Peshkin's closing remarks provide sound advice for school personnel faced with the consolidation dilemma:

> . . . we ought to attend to the parallel concerns of both the school and the community, while avoiding equally the trap of believing that what is familiar is good, or that what is new is necessarily better (p186).

**Open vs. Closed Attendance Areas**

Few sources of information dealing directly with this topic were found in the literature. Henderson (1978) mentioned as a possible alternative for schools slated for closure the creation of special purpose schools (ie. for the gifted, disadvantaged, or vocational schools) with open attendance boundaries so that students from a wide surrounding area could attend. For such a plan to be implemented, the school districts involved would have to reach an agreement of some kind regarding financing, transportation, and other problems associated with implementation of the project.

Plante (1981) notes that transportation costs for students involved in interdistrict shared programs (such as vocational and special education programs) can be reduced by forming an interdistrict transportation cooperative. Such a program might utilize a number of alternative modes of transport, such as public transportation, mini-busses, taxi, parents and responsible citizens. Plante also suggests that school boards consider realigning attendance areas as a means of obtaining the most cost-effective utilization of their schools and transportation systems. As well, Plante points out a number of characterics of successful educational cooperatives. They receive either state funds, state matching funds, or strong financial support from their respective communities, and they must be willing to cooperate and compromise. Strong leadership and a commitment to the task are also essential to a successful cooperative program. He recommends that the following steps be followed in development of shared transportation services:

1. Forecast the number of students likely to be involved.
2. Determine the facilities which will be needed to provide the program.
3. Examine the feasibility of a regional center for shared programs.
4. Evaluate the desirability and cost efficiency of hiring a private contractor for the service.
5. Analyze the total operating cost and per unit costs of contracting for the transportation of all students on a cooperative basis.
6. Consider negotiating a contract for several districts rather than on an individual basis with the transportation company.

7. Institute regular meetings with the transportation supervisors of adjoining districts. The purpose of these meetings will be to investigate the possibility of forming a transportation cooperative.

Veselka (1980) discusses a number of strategies involving interdistrict cooperative programs, as does Bussard (1981a). These were mentioned in an earlier portion of this report.

There is a great deal of material in the American literature relating to interdistrict movement of students. For the most part, these are reports of desegregation programs. One such report, by Saint Louis Public Schools (1981), is noteworthy. It outlines a set of criteria deemed necessary to the operation of interdistrict transfer arrangements. While these were formulated for the operation of a desegregation program, many are applicable to any interdistrict program. The recommendations of general interest are:

1. Determine the space availability in the host district.
2. Specify criteria for eligibility of students for the program.
3. Specify the financial arrangements for the plan, including an itemized budget.
4. Specify criteria for location of programs.
5. Specify criteria for staff exchanges, parent/community involvement, transportation arrangements, and administrative coordination.
6. Investigate the possibility of obtaining state funding for the program.

In reference to transportation arrangements, it is noted that precise estimates of the number of students involved and the locations of programs will be necessary before specific arrangements can be made. Transportation experts should be involved in resolving the details of routes, distances, and kinds of transportation to be used.

**Vouchers**

Young (1981), in a report prepared for Alberta Education, presents a comprehensive treatment of voucher systems. Young cites Bridge (1974) to illustrate the basic rationale behind voucher schemes (p 1):

> . . . The basic idea of education vouchers is simply that school districts provide parents with direct grants of money to implement their choices among schooling alternatives; with these vouchers, they may buy their way into any school that will have them. In theory, providing parents with direct money grants to buy schooling sets in motion a complex causal chain which results in improved student performance and increased

parental satisfaction . . . .

Supposedly, vouchers will cause a broader range of schools to enter the educational marketplace, and because parents will have direct control over purse strings, teachers and administrators will be more responsive to parents' wishes and children's needs. This will somehow lead to instructional innovation which will result in improved student performance and increased parental satisfaction. What these educational innovations might be is anyone's guess; however, most people seem to think it is a matter of more faithfully applying the teaching technology that we have, not the development of magic new systems. Stated quite harshly, vouchers operate on the premise that students will perform better if schools try harder, and schools will try harder if they are directly accountable to parents who have a big financial stick with which to exact performance. The voucher scheme is merely a means of distributing the financial stick to parents.

The Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970:20; cited by Goldberg 1978:7 and Young 1981:6) identifies seven different educational voucher models. Following is a brief description of those models, and in some instances, the names of those most closely associated with each is included:

1. The Friedman - Unregulated Market Model.

   Households would be issued with the same redeemable value for each child at any school of parental choice. All schools (public, private, and parochial) could charge tuition to the amount of the voucher. The amount of the voucher per child would initially be legislated at a level equal to the existing level of expenditure in public schools.

2. The Sizer-Whitten - Unregulated Compensatory Model.

   The value of the voucher would be higher for poor children. Schools are permitted to charge whatever additional tuition they wish. Families with incomes above the national average would receive no subsidy. The value of the voucher would decline to zero as the family income approached some defined level.

3. The Compulsory Private Scholarship Model.

   The schools could charge as much tuition as they liked, provided they gave scholarships to those children unable to pay full tuition. Eligibility and size of scholarships would be determined by the Education Voucher Agency which could establish a formula showing how much families with certain incomes would be charged.

4. The Coons-Sugarman Effort Voucher Model.

This model established several different possible levels of per pupil expenditure and allowed a school to choose its own level. Parents who chose high expenditure schools would be charged more tuition (or tax) than parents who chose low expenditure schools. Tuition (or tax) would also be related to income. In this manner, the "effort" demanded of a low income family would be the same as the "effort" demanded of a high income family in the same school.

5. The Egalitarian Model.

the value of the voucher would be the same for each child. No school would be permitted to charge any additional tuition. Schools could solicit money for special programs from government agencies, foundations, or industry. Voucher increases could be lobbied. Community school committees would be encouraged.

6. The Achievement Model.

The value of the voucher would be based on the progress made by the child during the year. Schools would be rewarded when students exceeded predicted levels and penalized when students fell below predicted levels. Schools might contract achievement levels where monies were proportional to gains on standard tests.

7. The Jenck's - Regulated Compensatory Model.

Schools could not charge tuition beyond the value of the voucher. They could "earn" extra funds by accepting children from poor families or educationally disadvantaged children. A variant of this model permits privately managed voucher schools to charge affluent families according to their ability to pay.

Benson (1978b) gives a brief outline of some of the pros and cons of voucher systems. Arguing in favor of voucher systems, Benson claims that the increase in the number of specialized institutions that would emerge under a voucher system would enhance the development of the special abilities and interests of each student, whereas in the past, educational systems have had difficulty in responding to such specialized interests. Parents could (p175) "exercise choice in education and thus bring to bear their most intimate knowledge of what is good for their child in selecting a school for him or her."

As well, voucher systems would break down the current near monopolistic situation of local school boards in the provision of educational services. Since exercising choice under the current system requires a change in residence, in reality choice is almost nonexistent. Benson feels that the private schools that would emerge in response to a voucher system would increase competitiveness, and thus improve the quality of education.

On the negative side, Benson feels that implementing voucher systems would be an administrative nightmare. It would be difficult to ensure that schools did not depart too far from basic values, or that unscrupulous operators did not take advantage of less well informed parents. As well, it would be difficult to overcome the fact that geographical location would still be a necessary consideration in choice of school, particularly in rural areas.

Young (1981) presents a more comprehensive assessment of the pros and cons of voucher systems. He says the arguments favoring the use of educational vouchers deal with social equality, economic equality, healthy competition, service accountability to parents as clients, human enthusiasm and commitment, shared values, and reduction of financial pressures on sectarian and private schools.

Social equality would be enhanced because vouchers would give all parents the choice of where educational services could be obtained as is the case with other social benefits.

The use of vouchers would permit all households to obtain the same amount per child and thus equalize economic opportunity in choice of schooling.

Given parental choice of schooling, schools would have to compete to attract and hold clients. Improved education and leveling of costs would occur over time between public, parochial, and private schools.

If schools did not deliver the desired level of service, parents could transfer their child and his education voucher to a school that would. When a school lost enough clients, it would either improve delivery or be out of business.

Professional enthusiasm and commitment of teachers would improve, with more teachers developing their own programs. Parents and students would feel more involved in education by assuming a greater decision making role in the choice of a school and program. Power and decision making in education would become more decentralized and less bureaucratized.

Particularly in large urban centers, the development of unique schools to attend to shared values such as music, science, physical education, and so on would be more feasible.

If vouchers covered the full cost of education, non-public schools would not be forced to rely on financial support from religious organizations or affluent parents.

According to Young, the arguments against educational vouchers deal with social inequality, religion and public education, inappropriateness of the market analogy, economics, resistance of the public school establishment, destruction of the public school system, exchange of bureaucracies, administrative problems, and lack of parent decision making ability.

Social inequalities might result in that advantaged children would probably receive far better schooling under the market proposal than would disadvantaged ones, leading to a widening of the gap between the middle class and the poor. Admissions policies of autonomous schools might have a discriminatory effect. Elitism might result from use of admission criteria such as academic ability, religion, or race. The voucher principle opens the door to the possibility of voluntary segregation.

Conclusions about the viability of a voucher system including sectarian schools vary. Eliminating sectarian schools (or private schools) would leave the present public school monopoly unchallenged.

The market analogy is inappropriate in that new schools would be at a disadvantage competing with large, well established businesses that already possess the labor, facilities and experience that new businesses often lack. As well, running schools as businesses is questionable, in view of the fact that many educational outcomes are difficult to measure in terms of dollars and cents.

A voucher system would likely be more expensive than the present system. Children in private and some sectarian schools, whose education is now paid for by their parents, would then be paid for out of the public purse. Transportation costs would be higher, as more students would be attending schools further from home. Administrative costs for a voucher system would also be much higher for a voucher system than they are currently. Collecting and allocating voucher funds fairly and efficiently would also be a problem.

A voucher system would likely encounter strong opposition from the public school system, which has a vested interest in maintaining the system as it now exists. School personnel would probably resist strongly, as job security would be almost totally lacking under a voucher system. Would unions still be viable for educators? Would teacher tenure, salaries, and so on apply only within the confines of each individual school?

If the voucher system was regulated to safeguard consumers, it would probably eliminate the supposed benefits that result from an open competitive system. The regulatory system may be as complex as the current educational bureaucracy.

Finally, it is felt that disadvantaged clients may lack the decision-making capability to make the most appropriate choices for their children, or to have the impact on educational policies that advantaged clients would have, unless special efforts were made to involve a wider spectrum of the community in the decision-making process.

Young (p28) summarizes the pros and cons of educational voucher systems as follows: proponents of the concept would visualize healthy competition; service accountability to clients; the stimulation of enthusiasm and commitment of teachers, parents, and students to education; equality of access to clients of the private benefits of education; and opportunities to develop "specialist" schools. Those persons opposed to the system of voucher education argue that it may lead to social inequalities and elitism; to the destruction of public education; and to the chaos of the marketplace; parents might not be able to make the best possible choices for their children in terms of the social benefits of education to the nation. In general, education would become turbulent, ruled by market forces and aimed primarily at private benefits and enterprize.

There have been relatively few actual experiments with voucher systems. Sivak (1979) examines the use of the concept in four school districts in the United States.

Alum Rock, California adopted the use of the voucher concept (1972-76) with the goal of decentralizing administation and increasing the participation of the community in the schools. The district was very poor and had a large minority population. The program was implemented with the assistance of a large amount of federal money over a five year period. When the federal funding was withdrawn at the end of the five years, the experiment folded.

Cincinatti, Ohio implemented a voucher experiment in an attempt to achieve racial desegregation and alleviate problems of school closings and the related financial and social problems that accompany school declining enrolments.

Eugene, Oregon implemented their voucher experiment (1973) primarily in an attempt to improve the quality of education.

Minneapolis, Minnesota had four goals for their voucher system: decentralize the administration, improve community participation in school governance, upgrade facilities, and desegregation. Their program also relied heavily on input of federal funds. (6.5 million for five years)

These experiments for the most part had limited success. Although some long term effects were achieved, such as desegregation and improved community participation, none of these experiments resulted in wholesale adoption of a voucher system.

Of these, the Alum Rock experiment is considered the closest approximation to a true voucher system. Young (p12-18) provides a detailed description of the experience. The Alum Rock experiment was a modified "regulated compensatory" voucher system. At the outset, lack of parent information about the system was an inhibiting factor on effective choice of schools; however, this improved during the course of the experiment. Surveys showed that most parents chose programs for educationally irrelevant reasons such as geographic location of the program, or desire to keep siblings or friends together. As well, parent choice was limited by enrolment ceilings for each mini-school.

Teachers generally viewed the competition between mini-schools as acceptable, rather than harmful, and felt they had greater control over curriculum, budget, and staffing decisions although this varied widely from school to school. Teachers had smaller classes and were able to spend more time with students.

A number of characteristics of the Alum Rock experiment must be mentioned that limit its viability as a true test of the voucher system. Only public schools were included, (parochial schools were not involved) and both school survival and staff employment rights were guaranteed. As well, only the elementary portion of the system was involved. For these reasons, we are limted as to what conclusions can be drawn as to the workability of voucher systems.

Before leaving the topic, it is interesting to note, as Young points out (p32), that there are a number of activities ongoing in Alberta that may be viewed as precursors to the ends which education vouchers are to serve. He states the major purpose of vouchers is to place increased power and control of education of children into the hands of parents without restricting any child from obtaining a quality education program. Some of the activities occurring in Alberta which permit and encourage "grassroots" involvement in education are:

1. Decentralized budgeting, which is a system of school-centered planning and decision making.
2. A system of school grants for program purposes such as the Elementary Opportunity Fund.
3. Funding of private schools.
4. Open enrolment policies in many school jurisdictions.

5. Correspondence school and home tutorial programs.
6. Parental involvement programs such as Education North, the School Lunch program, Community Education, and Early Childhood Services.

Young feels that these elements, if amplified, could possibly accomplish the same or similar purpose as a dramatic shift to a voucher concept.

**Summary**

This paper reviews the literature on the following topics of concern relative to attendance areas: declining enrolments, neighborhood/community schools, quality schooling in small schools, school bussing policies and practices, centralized vs. decentralized schooling, open vs. closed attendance areas, students crossing jurisdictional boundaries, and voucher systems.

The most commonly adopted strategies for dealing with declining enrolments are: adjust attendance area boundaries, relocate programs/grade levels, establish split classes, twin or pair schools, establish special purpose open enrolment schools, develop alternate uses of excess space, close (or phase closing) schools, and share services with neighboring jurisdictions. Closing schools is considered a last resort, and should be undertaken only after careful planning and thorough investigation of all possible alternative uses of excess school space. A number of possible alternative uses are discussed in the main text of this paper. School boards are advised to develop policies for the efficient use of excess school space. If closure is necessary, the public should be consulted at every step of the process. As well, new buildings should have designed in flexibility to maximize their adaptability to alternate uses at a later date.

Single school districts face special problems in dealing with decline, since fewer options are available to them (ie. closing). Some possible strategies are: regional consortiums to share programs, services, and staff, greater use of correspondence courses, combining related courses, opening electives to several grade levels, retraining or recruiting staff competent to teach several areas, and alteration of the school schedule to better utilize staff time and resources.

By making excess space available, declining enrolments have given impetus to the community school movement. Similarly, a backlash against centralization as a response to declining enrolments has led to the concept of the neighborhood school. Some perceived advantages of neighborhood schools are: stronger feeling of belonging among students and staff, better relationships among staff and administration, ease of communication, and the absence of alienation so common in larger schools. The primary weakness of small schools is the inability to offer a varied curriculum. Because the small school usually plays an essential role in community vitality and identity, the decision to close should be studied carefully.

Small schools have to seek solutions to educational problems with a view to their unique circumstances, as solutions designed for large urban systems cannot be assumed to work equally well in the small rural setting. Some strategies for improving the quality of schooling in small schools are: regional service agencies as means of organizing cooperative efforts and providing specialized services, greater efforts to prepare teachers to work specifically in the rural setting, and the development of curriculum materials appropriate to the community in which they will be used. As well, political organization can be effective as a means of promoting the viability of small schools, and resisting closure efforts.

Bussing policies and practices are a major concern in rural systems, expecially when centralization is being considered. Studies of bus transported students indicate that riding times up to ninety minutes do not significantly affect achievement. Recently developed computerized bus routing techniques can reduce the manual work involved and allow consideration of a greater number of alternatives than is possible with manual techniques. They have considerable potential for improved efficiency and reduced costs in larger systems. A number of recommendations for improving bussing practices are contained in the main text of this report.

Centralization is an important issue in rural areas, and has both strong supporters and opponents. In favor of centralization, it is argued that it helps eliminate regional disparities, ensures minimum standards are maintained in all areas, is more cost efficient, and enables better administration. On the minus side, it is argued that decision making in centralized systems is slower, and fails to utilize knowledge of local conditions; centralization tends to reduce the opportunities for local initiatives; larger systems make it more difficult to judge the quality of educational resources; and finally, decentralization fosters competition among neighboring jurisdictions.

Voucher systems are one proposal that has been examined as a means of improving the delivery of education. Proponents of the concept visualize healthy competition, service accountability to clients, the stimulation of enthusiasm and commitment of teachers, and opportunities to develop specialist schools. Those opposed to vouchers argue that they may lead to social inequalities and elitism, to the destruction of public education, and to chaos in the market place. As well, parents might not be able to make the best possible choices for their children in terms of social benefits to the nation. In general, education would become turbulent, ruled by market forces, and aimed primarily at private benefits and enterprize. Some aspects of the voucher concept, such as decentralized budgeting, school grants for special program purposes, open enrolment policies in some jurisdictions, and correspondence and home tutorial programs, already exist in Alberta.

**Appendix 6 - Survey to Other Alberta Jurisdictions**

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

*This survey is being conducted by the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta as part of a larger study which is being carried out on behalf of an Alberta School Division.*

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January 1984

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREA SURVEY

**School Bussing Policy**

1. What are the policies or regulations of your school system regarding the following:
   a. Maximum time spent by any pupil on a school bus
   b. Maximum distance from school before a student is eligible for bus transportation
   c. Maximum distance a student must travel from their gate to the bus pickup point
2. Does your system have a policy or regulation regarding maximum mileage for any one bus route
   a. Yes _____ Maximum Mileage _____
   b. No _____
3. What is your system's policy regarding transportation for:
   a. extra-curricular activities
   b. transporting students from other districts (e.g. Separate School students) students from one attendance area to another

4. **Does your system have any shared transportation arrangements with other school systems? If it does could you briefly outline this arrangement, or attach a copy of the policy.**

### Attendance Areas

5. Does your school system have policies or arrangements with respect to the following? If so, could you briefly outline the policies or attach copies.

   a. attendance of out of system students in your school

   b. attendance of your students in out of system schools

   c. **movement of students from one attendance area in your system to a school in another attendance area in your system.**

### Centralization of Schools

6. Does your school system have a policy specifying criteria for closing schools?

   a. Yes _____

   b. No _____

   (If yes, please outline briefly or attach copies)

7. Does your school system have a policy favoring centralized or decentralized schools?

   a. Yes _____

   b. No _____

   (If yes, please outline briefly or attach copies)

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

8. Does your school system have a policy regarding the adjustment of attendance areas to balance enrolments?

   a. Yes _____

   b. No _____

   (If yes, please outline briefly or attach copies)

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

## Quality Schooling in Small Schools

9. Please outline briefly or attach copies of your system policy, if any, regarding:

   a. minimum / maximum school size

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   b. minimum / maximum class size

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   c. split classes

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   d. alteration / relocation of programs in response to declining enrolment

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

10. Please outline briefly or attach copies of any specific policies / programs directed to improving the quality of education in small schools.

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________________

## Appendix 7 - Summary of Survey Results from Other Alberta Jurisdictions

### Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of a survey of Alberta school systems undertaken as part of the **Spirit River Attendance Area Study**. The survey investigates the practices, regulations, and policies in four major areas:

1. School Bussing Policy
2. Attendance Areas
3. Centralization of Schools
4. Quality Schooling in Small Schools

Fifteen of the twenty-four systems surveyed have returned their questionnaires, for a return rate of 62.5%. Where copies of policies and/or regulations have been included with the questionnaire, these have been summarized. Responses that are in any way ambiguous are quoted.

### School Bussing Policy

1. **What is the policy or regulations of your school system regarding the following:**
   a. **Maximum time spent by any pupil on a school bus:**

Responses to this question can be summarized as follows:

Sixty minutes or less -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -6
Seventy-five minutes -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- 2
Ninety minutes -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- 3
More than ninety minutes -- -- -- -- -- -- 3
No response -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -1

   b. **Maximum distance from school before a student is eligible for bus transportation:**

Nine respondents indicated a maximum of one and a half miles and two indicated a one mile maximum. One respondent had a differential policy: half mile for Kindergarten to Grade Four inclusive, and one and a half miles for Grades Five to Twelve.

As noted by one respondent, the School Act, (Section 156: 3-c) states that "students residing within 1.5 miles (2.4 Kilometers) of the school that they attend are not eligible for school transportation. If possible and convenient, and space is available on the existing equipment, the ineligible students may be considered for transportation."

c. **Maximum distance a student must travel from their gate to the bus pickup point:**

One respondent indicated a half mile and two indicated a quarter mile. One had a differential policy: a quarter mile in the morning and half a mile in the afternoon. Another said one kilometer (slightly more than half a mile).

Four responses were to the effect that service was provided to the gate or property line, although it was noted that in some cases, students might have to walk some distance from their residence to the public road allowance. Another said that students were picked up at the door if roads were in proper condition. Two respondents simply stated they had no policy in this area, and three did not answer this question.

2. **Does your system have a policy or regulation regarding maximum mileage for any one bus route?**

Fourteen respondents answered "no" to this question, and there was one non-response. One respondent added that this was determined by time, not distance, and another added that the average distance per route was 163 km.

3. **What is your system's policy regarding transportation for:**

a. **Extra-curricular activities:**

All fifteen respondents indicated some form of transportation support for extra-curricular activities. Five respondents included detailed policy statements, and these are summarized as follows:

> Funding for extra-curricular activities is administered through a mileage allotment based on the fiscal year. Each school receives a basic mileage allotment based on enrollment. As well, schools having a band program receive additional mileage. Schools may purchase extra miles at a rate set annually by the Board. The Principal prepares a yearly mileage plan for the Superintendent's approval. The Superintendent is responsible for approving trips within Alberta, and the Board must approve all trips outside Alberta. Schools qualifying to compete in Provincial competitions receive additional mileage. Use of vehicles other than school busses, or volunteer drivers must be approved by the Supervisor of Transportation, and will only be approved if sufficient liability insurance is carried.

Use of busses for conveyance of students for extra-curricular activities is required, subject to limitations set by the Board. Included are events regularly scheduled by the Sports Committee, and Provincial playoffs. Events not scheduled by the Sports Committee must have the approval of the school Principal. If the number of participants make bus transportation impractical, privately owned vehicles may be used provided the Principal has designated a teacher or another responsible adult as a supervisor in the vehicle, and the owner carries sufficient public liability insurance. Bus students remaining after school to participate in extra-curricular activities must present to the bus driver written consent from their parents. One written consent is sufficient for the year, provided students inform the driver in the morning, or before the bus leaves at dismissal time, that they will be staying for extra-curricular activity.

This policy approves transportation for field trips in four categories: co-curricular (subject area related), organized sports activities, provincial athletic and academic competitions, and special events. Allocation of co-curricular trips is based on student enrollment per school. School administrators will meet and devise a schedule of in-County sports activities for the school term and submit these to the Superintendent and the Bus Supervisor for approval. Allocation of trips for special events will be determined by the Board as the need arises. The County will fund approved trips up to certain limitations, beyond which the school must pay for the driver and fuel. The Superintendent, and the Supervisor of Busing are authorized to approve field trips within the guidelines established by the Board of Education.

In addition to approved in-system extra-curricular activities, the Board has authorized a limited amount of funds for provincial sports competitions.

This policy approves bus transportation for extra curricular activities, when suitably planned, executed, and followed up. Each Principal is responsible for ensuring that trips achieve the objectives of the school programs and stay within the school's transportation budget. All schools receive a Bus

Transportation Allocation based on enrollment for authorized activities. Additional mileage and/or trips may be approved by the Superintendent provided the School students assume responsibility for the expenses.

The remainder of the responses were similar to the above policy statements. In all cases, transportation for extra-curricular activities is provided by the board, up to certain specified limits. In most cases, additional trips are allowed, subject to the approval of the Superintendent, if the school will provide the funding.

b. **Transporting students from other districts (e.g. Separate School students) from one attendance area to another:**

Nine respondents indicated some activity in this area. One respondent indicated they did nothing of this sort. One stated they had no policy regarding this matter, and four indicated the question was not applicable to their system.

One respondent included a sample transportation agreement specifying terms of the agreement. These included assurances of adequate insurance coverage, mutually agreed upon fee schedules and other administrative details.

Of the other eight respondents indicating activity in this area, it was done typically by a mutually agreed upon transportation arrangement. Some representative responses were:

Done only by mutually agreed upon Transportation Agreement.

Board approval of each individual case, and subject to agreement with the other jurisdiction.

Fee for service basis; negotiated annually in conjunction with tuition agreement.

4. **Does your system have any shared transportation agreements with other school systems? If it does, please outline briefly this arrangement, or attach a copy of the policy.**

Three respondents indicated they had some arrangement of this sort. Eight said they had no such arrangement. Three indicated the question was not applicable to them, and one respondent did not answer this question. The positive responses were as follows:

Done only by individual signed transportation agreement.

Some interchange on agreements - no charges.

Yes. The agreement is based on a formula by which we try to recover all our costs.

**Attendance Areas**

5. **Does your school system have policies or arrangements with respect to the following? If so, could you please outline the policies or attach copies.**

   a. **Attendance of out-of-system students in your school:**

All fifteen respondents indicated they had some form of arrangement. Four respondents included formal policy statements, which are summarized below:

> The Board believes that, subject to reasonable limitations regarding classroom space and utilization of its facilities, children from neighboring systems should be permitted to attend. This is permitted through reciprocal tuition agreements with those systems. If the non-resident pupil is attending with the approval of the School Authority of which he is a resident pupil, that authority shall be invoiced for non-resident fees. If he is attending without the approval of the School authority of which he is a resident, the pupil's parent shall be responsible for payment of non-resident fees.
>
> This sample tuition agreement establishes a Joint Committee of six members, consisting of the Superintendent and two trustees from each party, to oversee the arrangement. This Joint Committee shall rule on parent applications from the sending system. the receiving system agrees to provide a level of education equal to that provided to its own resident students. The sending system is responsible for transporting students to the receiving system, and shall pay a mutually agreed upon per student fee, to be billed and paid annually.
>
> Non-resident pupils may be permitted to attend provided there is sufficient accomodation at the school in question, and an adequate instruction program to meet the needs of the pupil. Such pupils may not be permitted to attend until tuition agreements have been completed with the sending Board. The Principal of the receiving school may approve the application of non-resident pupils. Applications he is not prepared to approve shall be referred to the Superintendent, whose decision is final. Tuition fees

> charged shall be in accordance with the schedule of fees established at the time of the students' enrollment in a school.
>
> Non-resident students shall be permitted to attend an appropriate Divisional School if there is sufficient accomodation in the school, appropriate programs are available, and non-resident tuition fees are paid. Tuition fees shall be established annually based on the net average local cost per pupil. Application for admission of non-resident pupils shall be made to the office of the Assistant Superintendent, Student Services. All admissions shall be subject to the approval of the Principal of the school in which the pupil will be enrolled. Non-resident fees shall be paid within fifteen days of the commencement of each semester.

Two respondents said they used the School Act as a guide for attendance of out-of-system students in their schools. Section 152(2) of the School Act states:

> A Board may charge tuition fees for any pupil whose parent is not a resident of the district or division but the fee shall not exceed the net average local cost per pupil of maintaining the program in which the pupil is enrolled.

Of the remaining nine respondents, six had some form of tuition agreement, though two of these specified that transportation was the responsibility of the sending system. One respondent indicated there was interchange on agreement, with no charges, and two said there were no charges for such arrangements.

b. **Attendance of your students in out of system schools:**

All fifteen respondents indicated they had some arrangement for attendance of their students in other systems. Three respondents included policy statements, which are summarized below:

> This statement outlines a specific agreement with a neighboring jurisdiction wherein the sending system is responsible for transporting students to the receiving school, any necessary insurance, and a mutually agreed upon fee arrangement.
>
> The Division accepts the responsibility for payment of tuition fees on behalf of approved students attending schools in other jurisdictions provided there is a tuition agreement between the Division and the receiving

> jurisdiction.
>
> Financial support may be provided for students attending schools in other jurisdictions if at least 40% of the courses being taken are not offered in his home school, or in the case of extreme personal problems. If such application is approved, the Board will provide a transportation allowance or a boarding allowance. Where a student requests such permission, his parents shall assume financial resonsibility for any tuition fees charged by the receiving jurisdiction. Students directed by the Board to attend in other jurisdictions for special education services are eligible to have their tuition fees paid by the Board.

Four respondents had arrangements administered through tuition agreements. Four said they would only provide financial support for Board approved arrangements, for reasons such as special program requirements. Three respondents indicated there was some sort of arrangement, such as interchange agreements, but no fee structure was supported.

c. **Movement of students from one attendance area in your system to a school in another attendance area in your system:**

Fourteen respondents indicated they had some arrangement for this. Of these, five included policy statements. One respondent indicated their system had no policy regarding attendance areas, but added that they set up the most economical, expedient bus routes. The included policy statements are summarized as follows:

> The Board believes that wherever possible, students should attend within their attendance area, provided the school offers the appropriate program. Where the specific classroom load is heavy, or available space in a school is limited, the Superintendent, in consultation with the Principal, may place students in the school of another attendance area. Students who desire programs not available within their attendance area may be placed in appropriate programs in other schools (ie. Special Education, Trades and Services, or Vocational Programs). Approval is granted provided there is room in the receiving class or grade, and parents supply their own transportation to the school or the nearest bus route in the adjacent

attendance area if there is room on the bus.

Permission for transfer between attendance areas will be guided by the following:

- parents apply by May 1st of the preceding term
- class sizes in the receiving school do not exceed recommended limits
- bus transportation will be provided if there is space on existing routes
- students not residing on existing routes must be transported by parents to the nearest established pickup point
- all applications for transfer must be renewed yearly by the parents / guardians
- Superintendent may at any time during the school term approve applications for students to attend outside their attendance area for educational reasons.

Parents may elect to send their children to schools (within the Division) other than the assigned school, provided that there is space in the desired school, and parents agree to provide transportation. Bus service may be made available if it can be accomodated by existing bus routes.

A student may attend a school outside his / her sub-division but no divisional transportation will be provided unless the student is in need of a special program not offered in his / her school, or has been directed to attend across sub-division boundaries by the Board. Attendance outside of a student's sub-division shall be subject to available space and Board approval.

The County transports children to the school in the attendance area in which they reside. Busses do not normally cross attendance area boundaries. Exceptions may be made for the following reasons: road configuration restraints, special program needs of the students, or compassionate reasons. Any exceptions must be approved by the Board on a year to year basis.

The remaining responses were to the effect such movement of students was permitted, though parents would have to provide transportation, unless the move was for Board approved reasons, such as special educational needs.

**Centralization of Schools**

6. **Does your school system have a policy specifying criteria for closing schools?**

Six respondents indicated they had such a policy, and nine said they did not. Three included policy statements. Since these policy statements were very similar in most respects, only one summary is included:

> There must be established in advance a "critical minimum enrollment" for each school expressed as a number or percentage of rated capacity. This is the point below which closure of the school must be considered as a possible alternative for the Board. When this point is reached, there must be communication to the parents and ratepayers in the attendance area that closure is a possibility. Where a Board decides to pursue closure, there must be a notice of motion at a regular Board meeting proposing that a specific school or schools be closed. Immediately following such notice, there must be written communication to all parents of the fact and implications of such motion. Such communication must address how a specific closure would affect the following:
>
> - the attendance area defined for that school
> - the attendance at other schools of relocated students
> - the need for and extent of bussing
> - effect on the social environment of the community
> - program implications for students
> - educational & financial impact of closure
> - educational & financial impact of not closing
> - the capital needs of other schools that may have increased enrollment.
>
> Such communication should also include a statement as to the proposed disposal of the closed school (ie. mothballing, lease to community organization, sale, demolition, etc.). There must be a public meeting to discuss closure, its implications for the students and the system, possible implementation, and possible alternatives. Such a meeting must be effectively advertised, and appropriate advance notice given. There must be an appropriate opportunity for

concerned electors to prepare a response, including preferred alternatives, and to present this response to the Board. Debate and vote upon the notice of motion can take place only after the above minimum criteria have been met. (Note: one repondent defined the "critical minimum enrollment" as sixty students in any of Grades 1 to 6, 7 to 9, or 10 to 12. Another defined it as 50 percent of rated capacity.)

Two respondents indicated they followed provincial guidelines in regards to school closure. The School Act (Section 149, 150) states:

> A board may, with the approval of the Minister, close a school or transfer all of the pupils of the school to another school for any period approved by the Minister.
>
> A board may delegate its authority to close a school under this section to a Superintendent of Schools, principal of a school, or other responsible employee.

7. **Does your school system have a policy favoring centralized or decentralized schools?**

All fifteen respondent answered "no" to this question, although two qualified their answers:

> No; we have no existing policy, but we do have a long term plan which states that no further centralization will occur.
>
> No; no specific policy; however, the high schools are regionalized and one junior high is regionalized.

8. **Does your school system have a policy to balance enrollments?**

Three respondents indicated they had such a policy, and one of these included a policy statement which read:

> The physical facilities constitute an extremely costly part of the Board's operations. Therefore, the Board believes that it can best utilize its physical and human resources by developing attendance areas relative to the schools it operates . . . The Superintendent shall review annually the attendance areas and make adjustments where deemed appropriate.

The other two indicating they had a policy in this area responded as follows:

> Yes; attendance areas may only be changed by the Board. Each situation is considered individually. The Board tends to prefer to directly control any

proposed changes in bussing.

Yes; the Division reviews attendance areas prior to March 1st each year to maintain under utilized schools.

The remaining twelve repondents stated that they had no policy in this area.

**Quality Schooling in Small Schools**

9. **Please outline briefly or attach copies of your school system policy, if any, regarding:**

a. **Minimum / maximum school size:**

Eleven respondents indicated they had no policy in this area. One included a formal policy:

> The Board may discontinue grade levels whenever enrollment in a school has reached its "critical minimum enrollment". This is reached when enrollment has been reduced to: 60 students in Grades 1 to 6, 60 students in Grades 7 to 9, or 60 students in Grades 10 to 12.

Three respondents indicated there was some sort of informal policy:

> . . . practice has been to build elementary schools with a capacity of 275-475 and Jr. / Sr. high schools large enough to accomodate projected enrollments for a five year period.
>
> The Board operates no one room schools. Hutterite schools are an exception They pay the extra cost as a special levy.
>
> No formal policy, other than that when enrollment of a regular school decreases to below 27, the school may be considered for closure.

b. **Minimum / Maximum class size:**

Seven respondents had no policy of any sort in this area. Four had formal policy statements which are summarized below:

> This policy applies only to the French Immersion program in Early Childhood Services. For each group of 35 children or fraction thereof, there must be a certified teacher holding an Alberta Teacher's certificate. If classes drop below 15 students during the year, it will be allowed to continue. However, during the next year of the program, efforts will be made to create a split class to regulate enrollments
>
> The aim of the Board is to maintain reasonable class sizes with the following

as a guide:

Grade One -- 20-23 students

Grade Two & Three -- 21-24 students

Grades Four - Twelve -- 22-25 students

Multigraded rooms (Split Classes) shall be kept to the smallest number of students possible.

No regular class should have an enrollment of less than nine students unless special approval is obtained from the Board. Principals should only seek permission to schedule classes of less than nine students where it is imperative that classes be offered in order that students may complete the requirements of their program. Correspondence courses may be made available as an alternative. The possibility of combining compatible courses should be considered.

Grade One will be staffed on a basis of a 22:1 pupil:teacher ratio. Grades Two to Nine will be staffed on a basis of 25:1. Regular High School classes will have a minimum size of 14 and classes over 35 will be split. Sequential classes (ie. Typing 10, 20, 30) may be combined to make up one class. Industrial Arts and Home Economics will have a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 22 students. Vocational Education courses will have a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 18 students.

The Board will, as much as possible, maintain a pupil/teacher ratio which is consistent with the average in Alberta. To maintain such a ratio, it is at times necessary to operate both combined and split classes. Combined or split classes will be considered when enrollment in an elementary or junior high school class falls below 12 students. Combined classes or correspondence courses will be considered if the enrollment in a high school class falls below 10. Notwithstanding this, high schools in the system should ensure that students, as a minimum, have access to core academic courses which could lead to high school matriculation.

Four respondents mentioned some informal policy:

School organization and class structure are left to the discretion of the

Superintendent within the budgetary limits established by the Board.

No formal policy; look at splitting Grade One if enrollment exceeds 28.

At high school level, class size must have a minimum enrollment of 8.

Informal Board policy of 20:1 ratio (or close to) at Grade One level. The problem is low enrollment in some vocational classes - when it gets too low the course is dropped (ie. Two students in Electronics 30 - dropped).

c. **Split classes:**

One respondent indicated a policy in this area (see last quote in 9.b). Ten answered "no", and four gave qualified responses:

No formal policy, but split classes are permitted by the Board when necessary.

No policy; done on the basis of staffing formula.

School organization and class structure are left to the discretion of the Superintendent within budgetary limits established by the Board.

Split classes are the result of maintaining certain schools in the local community situation.

No split classes as yet; the Board is wrestling with this approach.

d. **Alteration/relocation of programs in response to declining enrollment:**

One respondent indicated a policy related to this area:

This policy indicates that Grade levels may be discontinued whenever enrollment falls below 60 in any of: Grades 1-6, 7-9, or 10-12.

Of the fourteen who had no policy, four offered qualified statements:

No formal policy; each situation is reviewed individually.

None - though there is a teacher re-allocation policy.

The jurisdiction is not faced with decline, but rather a steadily increasing population.

No programs were dropped because of declining enrollment (1600 students down to 1250). We think enrollment has levelled off, and hopefully, programs will not suffer.

10. **Please outline briefly or attach copies of any specific policies/programs directed to improving the quality of education in small schools.**

One respondent submitted a policy statement related to this issue:

> To equalize the educational opportunity in small schools, the Board is committed to allocating porportionally more resources to small schools. The overall student - teacher ratio shall not exceed 25:1 if there are two grades in one classroom. It shall not exceed 20:1 if there are three grades in one classroom. Teaching staff for small schools shall be:
>
> 10 to 20 students -- one teacher
> 21 to 30 students -- one and a half teachers
> 31 to 40 students -- two teachers
> 40 to 45 students -- two and a half teachers
> over 45 teachers -- three teachers

Two respondents indicated that, while there was no formal policy, small schools operated on a lower pupil/teacher ratio, had more aide services, and received more supervisory time from Central Office. One stated that this was under consideration and review. Two indicated that there were no practices aimed specifically at small schools -that such practices were directed to all schools.

Interestingly, one respondent replied that:

> The Board does not view small schools negatively. In fact, they view small schools as having distinct educational and social advantages for students and parents. This has been reinforced by student achievement on Provincial exams. (Our small schools have typically scored 10-18 percentage points higher than the provincial average.)

## Summary

### School Bussing Policy

Only three respondents indicated a maximum time spent by any pupil on a bus in excess of ninety minutes. Six indicated sixty minutes or less. Nine respondents indicated a maximum distance from school before a student is eligible for bus transportation of one and a half miles, though in many cases the actual distance was less. Most respondents indicated bus service was provided to the gate. One respondent indicated a half mile maximum and two a quarter mile.

No respondents indicated having a policy or regulation regarding maximum mileage for any one bus route.

All fifteen respondents indicated some form of support for transportation for extra-curricular activities. Typically, support is provided up to certain specified limits, beyond which, the school or students must pay all or part of the costs for fuel and driver's wages. Nine respondents indicated they were involved in transporting students from other districts. These were typically administered by agreements specifying responsibility for insurance coverage, mutually agreed upon fee schedules, and terms of eligibility.

Only three respondents had some form of shared transportation agreement with other systems.

### Attendance Areas

All fifteen respondents indicated they had some form of arrangement for attendance of out-of-system students in their schools, as well as for attendance of their students in out-of-system schools. These arrangements are in most cases administered through reciprocal tuition agreements, or individual agreements, if student movement is only one way. In the case of sending systems, the Board typically covers associated costs if movement is for valid educational reasons; otherwise parents are responsible for transportation and tuition costs. In most cases, the receiving system will accomodate such students to the extent space is available. Transportation is provided only if it can be accomodated through existing bus service.

Three respondents reported some form of interchange agreement that did not involve a fee structure.

Fourteen respondents had some arrangement for movement of students between attendance areas within the system. The terms for such arrangements were generally the same as for arrangements with other systems. Movement is permitted for sound educational reasons, and provided space is available in the receiving school. Transportation is only provided on existing routes in most cases.

**Centralization of Schools**

Six respondents had some form of policy specifying criteria for closing schools, three of which included formal policy statements. These were very similar in nature and contained provisions for:

- establishment in advance of some "critical minimum enrollment"
- notification of parents and ratepayer of consideration of intent to consider closure when this point is reached
- written notification of the implications of closure
- public meeting to discuss these implications
- provision of time for concerned groups to prepare submissions
- decision on closure can only be made after the preceding steps have been adhered to.

All fifteen respondents indicated there was no policy favoring centralization or decentralization. One response was qualified, stating that they did have a long term plan stating that no further centralization would occur.

Only three respondents had a policy to balance enrollments. In these cases, attendance areas were reviewed annually by the Superintendent or the Board.

**Quality Schooling in Small Schools**

One respondent submitted a formal policy regarding minimum/maximum school size, and three informal practices were noted. There was no notable consistency among them. One reported a critical minimum of 60, another of 27. Another said it operated no one room schools.

Four formal and four informal policies were reported relating to minimum/maximum class size. These varied considerably by Grade level and subject area.

Only one respondent had a policy for split classes (considered when class size falls below 12 in elem.-jr. high, 10 in sr. high). Four respondents indicated split classes were utilized if necessary.

One respondent had a policy for alteration - relocation of programs in response to declining enrollment (Grade levels may be discontinued whenever enrollment falls below 60 in any of: Grades 1-6, 7-9, 10-12).

One policy was submitted relating to improving the quality of education in small schools. This specified lower staffing ratios for small schools. Two additional respondents indicated they had some practices in this area. These involved more aide services, more supervisory time from Central Office, and lower pupil/teacher ratios.